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["WE'LL HAVE NONE OF YOUR FLIRTATIONS WITH MY HUSBAND! I AM MRS. CAPTAIN DACRES!"]

THE BROWN LADY.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I HAD a strange dream last night," said old Mr. Holroyd, the moment he heard Linda the next morning. "Come over here, and sit by me, and hold my hand."

Linda obediently did as she was requested. "I dreamt very vividly, my dear, and I believe the dream was sent for a special purpose, and to assist my old blind eyes. I seemed to see standing at the foot of this bed my daughter Arabella, looking as I saw her last, only sad and sober, and not stubborn and defiant, and she was holding you by the hand, and you looked just as you do now. At least, as I suppose you look, a handsome girl with regular features, and dark eyes very like Arabella. You wore a dark green stuff dress, with a sort of dark green velvet waistcoat, and a collar with a silver horseshoe brooch."

"That is precisely as I am dressed now!" she ejaculated, in amazement.

"I am not surprised to hear it!" he answered. "This was no common dream, and in it Arabella spoke to me and said, 'this is my child,' and then she laid her hand on you, and then I awoke. I believe you are her child, and although certain inquiries must be made nothing can alter my belief. Stoop down and kiss me, my granddaughter!"

Linda complied at once, and laid her fresh young lips against his yellow, withered cheek.

At this moment a knock came to the door, and Leech entered, saying, "Mr. Gordon begged leave to come and pay his respects to his uncle."

Gordon was resolved to put his fate to the touch, and win or lose all. He could not bear his present maddened frame of mind any longer. After a short conversation about weather, hunting, &c., during which he noted with dismay the excellent recovery his uncle had made. He looked as if he were likely to keep his word, and live another twenty years!

"Would that girl never go!" and he glanced impatiently at Linda, who sat with her knitting in the deep window-seat. Yes! in answer

to a summons from Nanny she was going at last, and now he must speak. He must flatter up the old man, and make the very most of his opportunity.

"Uncle," he said, with a lowering brow, but with a soft voice, "you are known to be so kind, liberal, and charitable, that I want to enlist your sympathies on behalf of a poor friend of mine who has been unfortunate—a married man, with eleven children, who has lost a lot of money."

"A friend!" echoed the old man, tartly. "I don't believe in people who are unfortunate. They generally bring their troubles on themselves!"

"I quite believe that. You are right, as usual; but some people are not clever enough to cope with rogues and sharpers!"

"Has your friend lost much money?"

"He has, I regret to say, lost a great deal!"

"Then drop him, if you will take my advice. No good in keeping company with a fool. He will be wanting to borrow money from you next!"

"He could not well do that, for I'm as poor as Job! But my friend came to me in great

distress one day. He had been drawn into losing money!"

"How much?" interrupted Mr. Holroyd, quickly, "fifty pounds?"

"Oh! a great deal more than that!"

"More than that! Five hundred pounds?"

"More than that!"

"Then he must be a lunatic—a madman?"

"Anyway, his state of mind was so frantic that, to relieve him, I put my name to bills thinking I was perfectly safe; and—and—he is unable to take them up."

The deed was done now, the murder out. Gordon looked over at his uncle uneasily. How would he take it?

"What an ass you must be, sir!" he said, harshly. "What is this you are telling me about backing bills?"

"I know I have been an idiot to back anyone's bills; but I believed in my friend's honour, as I would in yours; and since he cannot take them up the penalty falls on me."

"Let it fall then!" said the old man, grimly. "It will serve you as a lesson for life!"

"But how can I pay the debt when I have no money?" he said, in a tone of despair.

"I suppose you are looking to me to help you?—like father like son. My money has not been saved with care to be thrown to the wind as if it was so much chaff!"

"If you will help me now, uncle, I'll promise never to ask you for another penny as long as I live."

"How much is it?" he said in answer—"a thousand pounds?"

"Seven thousand pounds would clear me," and Gordon Holroyd did not speak the truth, but he dared not say more.

(Mr. Holroyd heard the sum in silence, and then, after a little while, said—

"I must get a letter written to my solicitors to-morrow."

Gordon's heart leaped with joy.

"You may as well get my writing things, and write it for me."

He did as desired, and sat down at a table near his uncle's hand in hand.

"To Messrs. Hard and Fast," dictated the blind man.

"DEAR SIRS,—I desire the presence of one of your firm at Carrisbrooke without delay. Please travel down as soon as possible after receiving this, and bring the draft of my will.—Yours faithfully,

"J. Holroyd."

"Stamp it, direct it, and ring the bell, and send it to the post," said the old man.

Gordon did as he was ordered, and when the letter was despatched he breathed a deep sigh of relief.

A great load was off his mind. The old boy had "parted" far more freely than he had anticipated in his wildest, most sanguine moments.

But he was soon disabused of his delusion, and various rosy dreams that were forming in his mind were dispelled.

"Do you know why I have sent for Hard and Fast?" suddenly inquired his uncle.

"No, indeed, sir," he replied, although, in his heart, he was convinced that it was because he had decided to grant his request.

"Because I intend to alter my will, Gordon Holroyd!" said the old man, raising his voice till it was almost a shout. "Because, instead of the fifty thousand pounds I have left you, I mean to cut you off without a penny!—ay, and your father too. Not one farthing of my hard-saved money shall pass into your spendthrift hands! The place I can't help, it's entailed; and maybe you're not so sure of that as you think. But the personality is at my own disposal, and I can leave it to Leech, or Glubb, or to the poor-house, if I like. I shall make a new will, young man, in favour of someone else—someone who will be prudent."

"Seven thousand pounds! Why, my savings would be gone in a year! No, no! you have done for yourself to-day, Gordon, and you'll have reason to remember your friend, whose bills you back, as long as ever you live! It's near and dear friend, I fancy—the friend is yourself!"

"But, uncle, if you will only hear me—"

"I'll hear nothing! Go, now! The sooner you go back to London the better."

"Can nothing I could say excuse me?"

"Nothing. I do not wish to hear you speak again!"

"You are unjust! shamefully unjust!" said Gordon, his long-repressed passion now breaking all bounds.

"I am the best judge of my own actions!" retorted the other.

"And do you really mean to cut me off? Do you really mean to withdraw your legacy to me—that thirty thousand pounds you mentioned?" he asked, hoarsely.

"Most certainly I do; and you have only yourself to thank for it!"

"Then by Heaven you will be sorry for it!" said Gordon, his face distorted with rage. It suddenly shoked him to look at that useless, dimmed old man, powerless to spend or enjoy, hoarding thousands in his clothes, and retaining a small part of them to him, so eager, so thirsty for life and life's enjoyments!

"Don't dare to speak like that, Gordon, or I'll have you turned out of the house this hour!"

Gordon recalled his self-possession with an effort, and said,—

"I beg your pardon! I did not know what I was saying!—Grant me one favour, uncle? I will leave Carrisbrooke within a week; but, meanwhile, will you keep the reason of my departure a secret? No need for anyone to know that you have cut me off with a shilling; and I don't want to be the laughing stock of half the county."

"I shall not speak of it to anyone; it's not such a pleasant topic; but I'll never have any thing more to do with you! I shall file spend-thrifts!"

"I beg only now to your answer, sir," said Gordon, as he left the room.

Gordon's heart was full of despair and bitterness, and he hungered for revenge.

Mr. Holroyd had driven his nephew to his wit's ends, and sent him forth to hold counsel with his evil nature, and to listen to the promptings of a heart in which the uppermost thought was murder!

CHAPTER XIX.

For two or three days Gordon Holroyd went slowly brooding about the place like some bird of ill-omen, his head bent forward, his hands in his pockets, his dress careless.

He gave up hunting and dining out, and seemed to have some heavy matter on his mind.

Meanwhile, to his comfort and surprise, no emissary from Hard and Fast had appeared as yet at Carrisbrooke.

Linda's arm was better, and though still a good deal shaken, she went about her usual avocations as usual; and, amongst other duties, she walked into the village to replace the broken bottle of medicine smashed in the struggle with Soapy Sam, and, you may be very sure, that she went early, in broad daylight, and she went by a footpath through the fields, so as to escape that horrible stretch of road under the desmene wall.

In the village she met Captain Dacres. She came across him first at the post-office, and then at the chemist's, and finally he volunteered to escort her home. To this she demurred, but he quickly removed her scruples by saying,—

"I was going over to see old Mr. Holroyd. I have not seen him since I came back. He used to be very good to me as a small boy, though latterly there has been a sort of coolness between the families."

By this time they were walking briskly out of the village, and through a series of fields sheeted in deep snow.

There was no hunting for Captain Dacres, and he found time hanging heavily on his hands, or rather, had found it so. Walking beside this lovely girl, who had saved him from the assassin's knife, the moments seemed to fly—to fly only far too fast.

Putting her beauty aside, her soft, simple manners, her innocence, candour, and utter ignorance of many arts known to girls in society, was as novel to this world-worn young man as it was agreeable. His stepmother's airs and artificial graces, her sister's fast manners; Miss Cotton's slang, Miss Cotton's risqué little stories, her habit of making eyes were all intensely distasteful to him.

Walking and talking with Linda May was like coming out into the fields on a summer morning after spending hours in a hot, glaring, gas-smelling theatre looking at some gaudy and unnatural spectacle!

Their conversation presently turned on old Mr. Holroyd, and his illness.

"He is old, and broken, is he not? I suppose he can't last much longer?" said Captain Dacres.

"On the contrary, I should not wonder if he lived another twenty years. He has a fine constitution. I'm sure I hope he will for my sake!"

"Surely you don't expect to be his reader for the next twenty years? That would be a poor lookout!"

"No. Not exactly his reader," she answered, mysteriously.

Captain Dacres started.

He had heard of "May and December" before. Was it possible that this bright and seemingly ingenuous girl of nineteen could contemplate marrying blind old Holroyd, even with all his thousands?

"Why!" he exclaimed, almost involuntarily. "You would surely never—" and he halted, and added, emphatically—

"He is old enough to be your grandfather!"

The girl looked at him with a bright blush, and a rather abashed expression in her eyes, and said,—

"What are you thinking of?"

"Since you ask, I may as well tell you plainly that I presume, from your illusion to remaining in for the next twenty years with him, and *not* as his reader, that—"

"That what?" she asked, sharply.

"That you are going to marry him!" His companion came to a full stop on the snowy path, and, after a moment's hesitation, said,—

"Since I have told you so much I had better tell you all. Can you keep a secret?" looking at him fixedly.

"Certainly I can!" returned the young man, in rather a sulky tone.

Of course she was going to tell him all about the forthcoming nuptials. The notion of this beautiful girl standing before him, with her bright colour, sparkling eyes, and heavy coils of long chestnut hair; above all, her youth, going willingly to barter herself for thousands with the blind old man in yonder house, made him feel a qualm of revulsion and repugnance towards her.

And the old man had never even seen the beauty he was going to purchase! Haugh! The whole thing made him sick!

"Why do you look at me like that?" said the girl, impatiently. "You look as if you despise me! You said just now that Mr. Holroyd was old enough to be my grandfather, and you were right. He is my grandfather! Perhaps you will not look down upon me as you did a moment ago, when I tell you that I am his granddaughter, the only child of Arabella Holroyd, and my name is not May, but Delafosse!"

"You do surprise me, certainly!" he exclaimed, when he had recovered his amazement. "And have you known this always?"

"No. Only since I came here!"

"And your grandfather?"

"He knows it now. He knows it for the last three days."

"And your Uncle Isaac?"

"Ah! He has known it always. Known it since I was born!" and she proceeded hurriedly to relate her early days, the coming to Carrisbrooke, the letter in the book, his own father's recognition of the necklace, Mr. Isaac Holroyd's confession of her identity."

"I say! What a rascal he must be! I always doubted his sanctimonious face! As to Gordon, he is a bad lot. In spite of his air of *bonhomie* he is an extravagant, selfish, dissipated brute, over head and ears in debt. He broke my sister's heart. What a sell this discovery of yours will be to them—Isaac and his son. Do they know the mine you are going to spring on them?"

"No; I have no mine to spring! I have no substantial proof. Nothing beyond my face and my necklace, and a little mole on my neck."

"And these—though very satisfactory to your friends—are worth nothing in a court of law!"

"I know that!" she said, with a sigh; "and all proofs of my parentage are in Uncle Isaac's hands!"

"And to give them up would be to give you the property. I think I see him doing it. He would as soon part with his life."

"Yes; and he is determined to get rid of me, to banish me far from Carrisbrooke," said Linda. "I heard him say so when I was behind the screen; but I don't mean to go!"

"Your grandfather has not openly acknowledged you? I suppose he is waiting for proof?"

"Yes; for inquiries to be made. He asked Uncle Isaac to make them about the death of the child, and where it was buried, and all other particulars."

"Playing into Isaac's hands—playing his game!" said the young man, kicking the snow before him impatiently.

"Yes! You see we are so helpless, grandfather and I! He is blind, and I have no experience and no friends!"

"Don't say that! What am I? I may be able to help you, and you may rely on me to do my very best! It will be hard work, I know, to outwit that old fox, Isaac—excuse my calling names; but we have right on our side, and we can try and win! In the first place, you are certain that Mr. Holroyd believes in you?"

"Yes! certain—positive!"

"Why are you so sure?" he inquired, gravely.

"Well, he has said so most plainly, as far as words can go, and he is kinder to me, and gentler, and he—he—kisses me, or rather tells me to kiss him!"

"Lucky old beggar!" muttered her auditor, under his breath.

"And he would not do that, if I was only his reader."

"Of course not. Now I am going to begin to plot on your behalf, and to give you one or two pieces of advice if I may."

"Of course you may!"

"Firstly, say nothing to your Uncle Isaac and Gordon Holroyd at present, but just go on as usual. Secondly, get me the address—your—the London lodgings where your mother lived, the date and all that sort of thing; and, thirdly, and most important, get hold of your mother's marriage certificate, and keep it in your own hands. You don't know when Isaac might get wind of it, and take it into his head to ransack his brother's desk. That certificate is most valuable, and it was a wonderful stroke of luck your finding it, and the letter. If you had set to work to search, you might have been hunting for it for twenty years!"

"Yes, that's true! And here we are at Carrisbrooke! Shall I go up and tell Mr. Holroyd that you would like to see him?" she said, as they entered the hall.

"Do, if you please, and, in case he won't see me, will you get the address and dates you

promised me, and I'll set to work in your interests at once? There's no time to lose."

Old Mr. Holroyd was dozing, and could not then receive a visitor; and as Captain Dacres, not severely disappointed, walked back across the fields he carried a promise from his late companion that she would bring him the necessary notes and dates the following afternoon. At first he suggested meeting her at the post-office, but on second thoughts he suggested coming to fetch them, and said he would expect to see her at the old pagoda—not by the water, but the one in the pine woods, where four avenues met.

"Linda," said her grandfather, as he awoke, after sleeping through the best part of the wintry afternoon. "I feel dull and queer, and not myself at all. I feel as if something was going to happen!"

"What can happen?" she asked, with a smile.

"Ah! I cannot say. Where were you all the afternoon?"

"I was in the village getting your sleeping draught. Captain Dacres walked back with me!"

"Oh! Did he! That was strange!"

"Yes, and grandfather, I told him my secret! I could not help it! I told him who I was!"

"But that you had no proofs, though I should not twist you with that! I believe, as I believe in Heaven, that you are Arabella's child! What did young Dacres say?"

"He seemed surprised, and when I told him that all the proofs of my identity were in Uncle Isaac's keeping, he looked very serious. He laughed when he heard that you had put Uncle Isaac on the search! He does not believe in his honesty. He says he will help us himself, and that, if I provide dates and addresses in London, he will set to work at once."

"Ay! but why should he be so interested about you—a stranger?" said the blind man, suspiciously.

"He does not look upon me as a *stranger*. He thinks I saved his life. One thing he said I was to secure, and that is the certificate of marriage. He said people might ransack your desk and carry it off."

"He has a bad opinion of the world; but so they might. Linda, that is well thought of. Open the desk now; the key is on a bunch on the dressing-table, and has a shamrock handle. Take out the papers and keep them yourself. You see how I trust you, and can rely on you to take care of your own rights."

And Linda lost no time in seeking the key, opening the desk, and transferring the precious documents to her own pocket. She carefully transcribed dates and the name of the church, &c., on a sheet of paper, put it in an envelope, and had it ready to hand to Captain Dacres the following afternoon; all this with her grandfather's sanction.

The next morning, when she stood beside her grandfather's bed, he looked grey, withered, and shrunken. He had had a bad night—he had aged by ten years.

"Linda," he asked, "you are there. I know your step. You have her voice and her step. Did you hear the bugle last night?"

"Bugle! what bugle?" she inquired in bewilderment.

"One that blows. Whenever anyone of the Holroysds are going to die," he answered, in a solemn voice.

"No! I heard nothing."

"It never fails as a warning. I remember hearing it for my father and mother, and now, I do not doubt, that I have heard it for myself!"

"There are other Holroysds in the house!" said the girl, stoutly. "Gordon, myself, and even Uncle Isaac, he would count!"

"At first it was a faint blast, a long way off. Then I sat up and listened—you know my meaning. It came nearer and nearer, and finally passed along the terrace under these windows, and blew a mighty blast—a summons,

like the trumpet on the Day of Judgment. It was a distinct call to some one!"

"Perhaps it was the wind?" suggested the girl. "The wind makes queer noises whistling round the corners and down the chimney!"

"Wind! nonsense!" he exclaimed, angrily. "I know that bugle-note above a hurricane. Once heard, never forgotten. I am blind, but I am not deaf. I have some of my senses yet, though I think my brother and Gordon have a notion that I am a doddering old idiot. Time will tell. Linda, do you see that parcel? It came by hand this morning, not by post. It's from my lawyers, and is my will. If the bugle sounds for me I must leave my affairs in order, and I'd turn in my grave if I left that will behind me! Take it at once and throw it into the very heart of the fire, and hold the poker down upon it till there is nothing left of it but *ashes*!"

The will took a very long time to burn, but at last the thick sheets were consumed—nothing but a black illegible mass remained in the middle of the grate.

"I hope you have burnt what I told you, and played me no trick this time," said the old man, very sharply. "If you have it will be the worse for yourself, and no one else. You will be the sufferer!"

"I have done what you bid me," she answered, "the will is in ashes!"

"And you, can you prove your case, are now heiress of all I have. Gordon's fifty thousand are gone, gone to smoke! If that bugle means me I am only sorry for one thing. What does a blind, old helpless man want with life? I only desire to live to see you in your right place—to see you acknowledged as Linda Holroyd. You take my name, of course—not such an outlandish one as your own, Dafosso. 'Of the ditch,' it means. A nice name for any decent girl!"

"I hope you may live for many a year, grandfather!"

"I don't believe I shall; and I had better prepare myself for death—myself and you. Open that safe of mine in the wall with the Chubb key. Have you got it? Well, take out the papers, the bag of sovereigns, and the roll of banknotes. Have you got them all, and the diamonds in the two morocco cases?"

"Yes."

"Bring them here, and let me feel them, and count them."

This proceeding he lingered over for a long time, tasting the sovereigns, holding the notes between his finger and thumb, as if loth to let them go.

"Take them all away, and carry them off to your room and lock them up. Be quick, before I may change my mind. I cannot—no, I cannot—bear to part with money!" and he threw himself back on his pillow and gasped painfully.

Linda, trained to implicit obedience, hastened to look up all this treasure in her wardrobe, and hurried back to the old man's room, and, closing the door carefully, came near and said,—

"What am I to do with the deeds, and notes, and money?"

"Keep them. Sew them in your dress—your petticoats. I feel as if I were gifted with second sight to-day, to make up for the loss of my eyes; and I seem to see into the future. After I die—you will have a hard time. You will have no friends—no one would believe your story. You will have no situation, no house over your head. Now, money does much. Money will help you to your rights, money will help you to friends; and by and by you will come and live here, and spend, I hope, a happier and better life between these walls than I have done! You must go to Hard and Fast; give them all your proofs, tell your story. Rupert Dacres used to be an honest, spirited boy. Rupert Dacres will help you, in as far as a young unmarried man dare appear as champion for a young unmarried woman. There! there! don't you hear? There is the bugle again!" and he started erect among his pillows, and Linda leant her head on one side,

and certainly did hear a faint—faint blast; at least, it was faint at first, then it came nearer and nearer, and finally passed under the windows, blowing an imperative summons, to someone.

It was as if the bugle was carried by a man riding at full speed, and soon it was borne away on the night wind, fainter, and fainter, and fainter.

"That's the bugle!" said the old man. "They say an ancestor of ours hanged a bugler in the civil wars, and the bugler has haunted us thus ever since. He has haunted us for more than two hundred years, and he is never heard but there is not a death within three days. He has come for me now! No, no, Linda! You are only wasting your breath. What do you know of the legends of the family? Of course, he would have come for me sooner or later; and, for that matter, the bugle will blow for you *yourself* some day!"

CHAPTER XX.

LINDA felt a good deal embarrassed by her two canvas bags of sovereigns and rolls of notes, and packets of deeds.

She took the deeds and sovereigns and locked them in her bag, but the notes and diamonds she locked in her desk; and having taken this precaution she went down to dine with Gordon Holroyd *tête-à-tête*.

Gordon was silent and gloomy—he had been in this condition for nearly three days. He had heard of the arrival of the *will* by hand that morning, and expected that one of the firm of solicitors would follow within the next four-and-twenty hours.

He had no time to lose. His father was away—that was one good job—and as soon as "the business" (as he mentally called it) was over the better.

He had another letter in his pocket from his chum in London, that goaded him to frenzy—goaded him to the perpetration of any deed—ay, were it half-a-dozen murders. His mind was like a cyclone—a storm revolving in a circuit without an outlet. His brain was maddened with brandy.

He sat and glowered at Miss May across the table.

She was thin, she had auburn hair, two abominations to him in womankind. He liked dark, short, lively little women, with red cheeks, and bright black eyes, and an abandon of manner that put him at his ease.

Linda May, his cousin, was an iceberg. However, he would soon bundle her out of the house, with a month's wages. Ay, and old Leech, who stared when he asked for a bottle of brandy up in his own room, and that cheeky-looking hussy his daughter, Nan.

He could not do it to-night; that girl opposite was a watch-dog that never left the sick-room till late; but to-morrow night she was going to a penny reading in the village, and the coast would be clear.

Yes, he would wait till to-morrow night!

The next afternoon Linda was to meet Captain Dacres in the pine shrubbery, and had him over the envelope she had prepared for him.

There was no concealment about the tryst. She told her grandfather when and where she was going, and she told old Leech too, and set off well-wrapped up, about three o'clock.

The pine shrubbery was a good way off—more than half-a-mile from the house—and was reached by a maze of leaf-strewn walks.

It was not far from the high road to the pagoda—a rather bare kind of summer-house, with windows all round, and ascended by a steep flight of white steps.

It had been a "tea house," now it contained a few old chairs, and a worm-eaten, rickety table, the remains of former good times.

Captain Dacres was first. He had been whistling and stamping about the room for fully twenty minutes, ere he saw the tall, slim figure hurrying towards the rendezvous.

"I am late I fear. Grandfather won't take his beef-tea from anyone but me, and he has only just had it."

"How is he?" he asked, politely.

"He seems better; but he has got a very odd idea into his mind. He thinks he is going to die very shortly!"

"What has put that in his head?"

"The bugler. I am not—or rather used not to be—superstitious," said Linda, colouring. "Grandfather says a bugle is heard before a death in the family."

"He is not doting, is he?"

"No; he talks as sensible as you do. He gave me the certificate and letters, and insisted on my taking a quantity of notes—nearly a thousand pounds' worth—out of a safe, and keeping them. Also two hundred sovereigns, and some valuable diamonds, and deeds relating to stock and bonds."

"Do you mean to say that you have these things now?"

"Yes, he made me take them and lock them away in my own room. He says he sees into the future, and that I shall have bad times when he is gone."

"You don't believe that he is *really* going? You don't believe in the bugle, do you, or in any such rubbish?"

"Yes! I must believe in that. I heard it most distinctly with my own ears—hearing it believing!"

"I'll tell you what you heard, then. Some village boy going along after dark, and keeping his courage up to the mark with a penny trumpet!"

At this she shook her head, and he continued.

"Well now to business. Where are my instructions?"

"There!" she replied, laying the envelope in his hands. "It is all I can gather. There is my baptismal certificate—May Lafosse. Curious that Miss Mee gave me one of my own names. It is very, very good of you to volunteer for this business. You see we cannot trust Uncle Isaac; and whatever expense there may be, of course we will pay. Grandfather desired me to say so."

At this moment she was rather startled to see a very tall, broad-shouldered woman, pass the windows. In another moment, she was coming up the steps.

She was of massive proportions, and wore a black dress, a grey fur tippet and muff, a red-and-black bonnet, and a small white veil. She looked between thirty-five and forty, and had fierce black eyes, pronounced black brows, jet black shiny hair, which she wore in a "Zulu" fringe. Her face was rouged; but her skin was a sudden purple shade, her features shapeless and swelled; her expression was anything but pleasing, and Linda shrank back from the malignity of her scowl.

"Ay! you may well be afraid to look at me!" said this creature, in a high, shrill voice. "Pretty doings! these meetings! I tracked him all the way from the village. I was bound to see his little game! Well, Dacres," she said, seating herself as she spoke, "pray what have you to say for yourself—eh?"

Linda glanced at him quickly. He stood leaning both hands on the table, and looking like another man, his eyes fixed half vacantly on the stranger, he had a look of sudden age, which sometimes comes over a young face in moments of terrible emotion. Deep lines about the mouth, furrows in the brow, and a hard-drawn expression. What ailed him?

"Who—who is this person?" asked Linda, in a low voice.

"Who am I?" interrupted the woman, with fierce abruptness. "That's a pretty question. Person, indeed, miss! Person yourself! I'll soon let you know who I am. We'll have none of your flirtations with my husband. I'm Mrs. Captain Dacres. There, now!"

And she squared her elbows on the table, and glared at Linda with a look of triumph and defiance.

"Dacres, my boy! you don't seem glad to see your own true love ten thousand miles away?"

And she began to sing. She had certainly been taking too much of something stronger than tea, and she thumped on the oak table, and sang in a high falsetto:

"Oh, she took a trip in a government ship,
Ten thousand miles away,
Then blow ye winds and blow, a roaming we
will go,
For I'm away to my own true love."

"How did you come here?" interrupted Captain Dacres, in a husky voice.

"Ah! you thought you had seen the last of me, did not you? But you have made a mistake. You make many a mistake in your time."

"And your promise?" he demanded, very sternly.

"Pooh!" snapping her fingers contemptuously. "What's a promise? Promises are like pie-crust, made to be broken!"

"And supposing I stop your allowance?"

"If you do I'll go straight to your father and claim my rights as the daughter of his heir. I'll dress and wear diamonds, and drive in a carriage with your caroty-headed step-mother and her sour-faced sister. I'll be placed in my proper position at last, so stop the allowance as soon as you like. Look here!" and she emptied a shabby leather purse with a clasp, knocked it on the table, and turned it inside out. "You see that, do you? That's the state of the funds, so you or your father must stump up. I don't care which; it's all one to me."

Linda stood looking on in silent horror. Such a creature as this was new to her, and she gazed alternately from the stern, white-faced, refined-looking husband to this not loud-tongued virago, years older than him, who said she was his wife.

"How did you come to England?"

"The usual way—by sea—second-class passage, twenty-five pounds; and after a few days' fun in London with some of my fellow-passengers I flew down here to see my beloved Dacres—my darling Rupert," and she sniggered.

"What has brought you to England?"

"I was sick of Raipore and the people. My mother took to bullying me, and my sister was as bad. A good joke—and then living on me. So I thought, one fine day, I'd just give them the slip. They went off to a dance, and I came off by the night mail to Bombay. They will be in a fine way!" she said, complacently. "I was tired of Raipore. I did not get my dues. The military people wouldn't look at me, though I was an officer's wife; the civilians were as bad, and I couldn't consort with such dirt under my feet as railway people and storekeepers, and missionaries. I wasn't treated as a *lady*, and I came away."

"And now that you are here, what are you going to do?" inquired Captain Dacres, very coolly.

"Why, live with you, the wife of your bosom!"

"No, thank you. You know I'd ten thousand times sooner shoot myself. You must go away quietly, and without a word or a fuss. If you blazon out who you are and disgrace me here, among my own people, as you have done elsewhere—I take this young lady to witness—you shall never have another penny of mine. No, I shall go at once to my father, tell him the whole story, place the matter in *his* hands, and leave the country. You'll see what mercy he will show you."

"You are a mean, common cad, and so the young lady will think, to speak in that way of your own wife. Many a better man than you has married beneath him—married folks like me."

"They have, poor devils! And it's not that I'm thinking of; your birth is nothing. If that was all I'd be a happy man. It's your conduct, your debasing vice, the mire through

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which my name is dragged. After the last time you wept and cried, and swore to the clergyman you would never trouble me again—*never* in life—those were your words. I paid your debts, and I allowed you four hundred a year, paid quarterly—three quarters of my allowance; and here, within six months you follow me to England—promises and regrets thrown to the winds."

"I'll go and see your father. He'll see fair play," said the woman, hysterically.

"He won't see you at all after he has heard the whole truth from me," replied her husband, in a quiet, decided voice.

The woman glanced at him furiously for a few seconds, and then said, in the tone of an ordinary remark,—

"I wish you were dead, that I do!"

"Here is one of the gardeners coming," exclaimed Linda, looking through a window which commanded one of the avenues leading to the summer-house.

"And I suppose I'd better go! Well, mind, I have not half done with you," said Mrs. Dacres to her husband, rising. "Mind, I haven't a penny—not what will pay my lodgings."

"Where are you staying?" he asked.

"At the 'Red Cow' in the village."

"Then you shall hear from me to-morrow."

"Without fail? No tricks upon travellers, you know!"

"Without fail."

"All right, then," and snatching up her muff she turned away without another word, and bundled awkwardly down the steps and disappeared in a shrubbery.

After she had gone her husband was silent for some minutes. Linda did not like to look at him. She felt most dreadfully embarrassed at having been an unwilling spectator of this matrimonial scene.

"Everyone has some skeleton in their cupboard," he said, presently, "and you have just seen mine."

"She does not look much like a skeleton!" said the girl, referring to her portly figure.

"I wonder you can *joke*," he exclaimed, reproachfully, "at what is like a living death to me!"

"I suppose you married her of your own accord?"

"In a sort of way I certainly did. I am in possession of your secret. Now you, and you alone in this country, know mine. Shall I tell you my story as we walk towards the house?"

(To be continued.)

"VENERABLE MOTHERS" OF MEXICO.—About fifty miles from the city of Mexico there is an Indian pueblo, governed by the "Patriarchal Council of Twelve," half of whom are women, called "The Venerable Mothers." This patriarchal dignity is conferred only on those who have raised large families, and have proved themselves devoted mothers and kind neighbours. When a young Indian proposes to go out into the world, the Patriarchal Council is called, and the contemplated exodus is fully discussed. If it is decided to let him go, the youth is solemnly advised by the "Venerable Mothers" in all things for his good, and is especially charged to do credit to his pueblo by being honest, truthful and industrious. Whenever the exile communicates with his people, it is said that his messages to "the dear old fathers and mothers" are as to his own kindred. A beautiful custom prevails in this Indian village, namely, that every eighth day is set aside for all the men and boys to leave their personal avocations, and labour from dawn till sunset for the blind and helpless, and the widows and orphans of the pueblo. Indeed, there is scarcely an Indian in Mexico who does not possess some homely virtues worthy of imitation.

INFLUENCE.

—C—

I DROPPED a pebble in the stream,
It sunk for ever from my sight;
A moment in the sun's warm beam
A diamond sparkled pure and bright,
Reflecting far its radiant light.
A circle, small indeed at first,
Widened e'en midst the tempest's roar,
Until at last it faintly burst
And vanished on the farther shore.

A frown, a scowl, an angry glance,
A hasty or unguarded word,
A formal bow, a look askance—
These, quicker than a swift-winged bird,
Pierce to the heart like two edged sword;
Spreading a baneful influence wide,
They cast a mirksome shade and gloom
Across life's rough and troubled tide,
And reach unto the silent tomb.

A word, a look of sympathy.
A penny generously bestowed,
A simple act of courtesy,
A kindly influence shed abroad,
And from the soul lift many a load.
These angel-deeds, grand and sublime,
Like ripples on the restless sea,
Sweep o'er the fretful stream of time
And reach into eternity.

P. C.

JUDITH.

—:0:—

CHAPTER XIII.—(continued.)

CARRIED away by his feelings Captain St. Quentin had said more than he intended; but a furtive glance into her face, which was looking very sweet in its confusion, would have tempted him to go on had not another thought restrained him.

He pulled out his watch and consulted it. "Are you going anywhere?" she asked, with a timidity that had been hitherto quite foreign to her nature.

"Not just yet. I must go presently; but it is very nice being out here in the sunshine and listening to the music—with you."

He was leaning on the door of the carriage, looking full into her eyes with such unmistakable meaning that no wonder the white lids drooped abashed. He was a lover of whom any woman might have been proud—to whom any might have succumbed without shame; and handsome as Judith had always thought him, she had never admired him so much as now. In his cricketing flannels, a small cap pushed back showing the short, crisp, fair curls that clustered round his flushed face, his eyes all alight with animation, he was the very incarnation of youth and strength and—if it did not sound effeminate it might be added—beauty.

"If I do not see you oftener it is not my fault!" he went on, encouraged by her silence, and, perhaps, by the sound of his own voice, it being so much easier to make love than to refrain from doing so when once the first step in that direction has been taken.

"Here comes Colonel Lea-Creagh!" said Judith, nervously.

Captain St. Quentin turned, and at the same moment caught sight of an equipage that he had reason to know well coming in at the gate.

Hastily he said, "good-bye!" referring to his former hint at an engagement, and Judith was left to conjecture whether it was the approach of his Colonel that had driven him away, or whether the arrival of Mrs. Hare had anything to do with it. It caused Judith a jealous pang to see that lady go through the same door, by which he had disappeared, a few moments later. It was with the greatest difficulty she could keep her attention to the subject Colonel Lea-Creagh had started, and she

felt quite impatient of the childlike smiles with which he had wreathed his old face in her honour as perhaps she guessed.

It is strange how a woman often comes to despise those who too palpably show the state to which they have been brought by her charms. So long as there is a doubt whether the victory is complete there is an instinct that prompts her to put forth her best endeavours; but, once this is assured, she takes no trouble to conceal her contempt.

Judith, though no coquette, liked to please, and had been very amiable to her elderly admirer up to a certain point; but now that he was unmistakably head over ears in love she grew disdainful, and a little angry at his folly. To win approval is very pleasant, but to arouse an earnest, unwelcome, passion, is embarrassing—to some women, revolting.

Colonel Lea-Creagh, it may be, did not betray much tact in the manner of his wooing, and was inclined to persecute her with his attentions in and out of season, so that she had been goaded into a withdrawal of her pity, and had lost much of her patience besides.

Mrs. Trevor coming up then, Judith entered into a conversation with her, and received all her messages of congratulation for Winifred, not demurring outwardly, whatever were her secret thoughts.

She was wondering whether Captain St. Quentin and Mrs. Hare were together then; if he were talking in the same vein, and with the same expression in his eyes and voice as when a few moments before he had talked to her. The gift of second-sight might have been a doubtful blessing, but she was longing for it then—longing to pierce the thick walls that were between them.

"It is a capital match!" Mrs. Trevor was saying, "and I hope the dear girl will be very happy. I can't help wishing though that the *denouement* had been postponed, for I wanted her to go somewhere with me to-morrow, and now of course she will be too busy."

"There is a great deal she must do, and Mr. Johnson will wish her to be with him probably," was the complacent reply; then, as a second thought, she inquired, "where are you going?"

"To Kanowar, to hunt for 'phulkarrries.' I hear you get them so cheap and good there, and I am draping the dining-room entirely with them, so want a quantity. I don't like venturing into the bazaar alone. I suppose you could not spare Miss Holt?" looking over with a smile at Judith.

Mrs. Sherston hesitated for a moment, and then said, slowly,—

"I don't see why she should not go—if she wishes."

"I should like it very much!" said Judith.

So it was arranged; Mrs. Sherston taking some credit to herself for removing, if only for a day, an influence she felt certain was adverse to her daughter's engagement. A few hours may make all the difference, for custom can reconcile us to almost any situation, imbuing us with a feeling that it is inevitable, and therefore that all struggle would be vain.

A few moments later they were driving home; the question that had been haunting Judith still unanswered, though still rife in her brain.

CHAPTER XIV.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

It had been agreed that Judith was to walk over, and call for Mrs. Trevor the next morning, as their houses were not far apart, and the railway station close to both.

She may have been a little earlier than the time fixed, for the bearer announced that the Mem-sahib was still in her room, and presently the ayah came out to ask Judith to go in.

Mrs. Trevor was busily engaged in trying the body of a dress on to a lay figure, and her

mouth being full of pins she could only turn and nod brightly.

"Do you know anything of dress making?" she asked presently, when her mouth was free.

"Nothing at all. I had no idea you were so industrious!"

Mrs. Trevor shrugged her shoulders.

"I have not much choice in the matter. I must have the dress altered at once, and my dirzies has left me."

"You could easily get another. Five or six came to Mrs. Sherston for service the other day when she wanted one."

"But they won't come to me. The man I discharged won't let them, because I fined him eight annas for cutting a yard of silk velvet all to waste, so that it is good for nothing—except pincushions."

"But that is boycotting!" cried Judith.

"You don't suppose Ireland has the monopoly of all the pleasant vices, do you?" asked Mrs. Trevor, drily.

"Still it seems strange in a conquered country!"

"Ah! that is your mistake. If you look upon this country as a conquered one you will live in a perpetual state of surprise. It is we who are conquered, not they. Every law is made to suit and to conciliate them—and degrade us. The native always gets the best of us in everything."

"But surely that is very bad policy. I should have thought that in the case of a people who are so easily impressed by anything in the shape of power, that it would be the worst thing possible to let us lose our prestige!"

Mrs. Trevor shrugged her shoulders slightly.

"It is not policy at all, it is expediency. Government is working for peace at present, not possession at any future date."

She had been settling her hat before the glass, patting her flat curls into position, and fastening a strip of black spotted net across her eyes and nose. When she turned she was amused to see Judith's serious expression.

"Why do you go into all these questions so deeply? Are you thinking of settling down out here?" she asked, rallyingly.

"I? Oh, no!" with a sudden blush.

"Then why do you take such an interest in all these matters?"

"Because I have a cousin in Parliament, who is inclined to take up India as a subject, and I promised to give him all the information I could collect."

Mrs. Trevor stared at her inquiringly; the question on her lips—why, if she had influential relations, she was out here in a dependent position? but she checked the impulse, and said instead, lightly—

"Oh! well, I hope you'll induce him to plead the cause of the oppressed oppressors. We want a little backing up."

The door opened to admit her six-year-old son, and Judith was a little surprised, and pleasantly impressed, to see how tender she was with him, how carefully she brushed his hair herself, and trained it into little curls, giving one of her own handkerchiefs to tuck into his coat-pocket, first sprinkling it with lavender water.

"You won't mind my taking him with me, will you?" she asked. "I don't like to leave him all day to the natives."

Judith hastened to reassure her on the point. Though she had liked the little woman from the first, she had not credited her with much feeling, and was pleased to see that, in spite of her frivolity, she had a heart.

"Is he your only child?" she asked, as they walked together to the station, little Julian between them, with a hand in each of theirs.

"Oh! dear no. I have two big boys in England at school; and *d'après* of that, could you not ask your cousin to give a thought to the present rate of exchange when he is instituting other reforms?"

Judith laughed, and said it was just possible

he might come out and see all these things for himself.

"Is he young, this cousin of yours, and unmarried?" a little meaningfully; and receiving an assent made a grimace, that caused Judith to exclaim eagerly,—

"That has nothing to do with it. I have known him all my life. He is like a brother."

Mrs. Trevor smiled quietly.

"*Qui s'excuse, s'accuse;* and as for brothers they are a trifle more dangerous than cousins—or friends."

Judith felt inclined to put to her the question which a few days ago she asked Winifred, but feared it might seem to have a personal application, and, moreover, obtain no trustworthy reply. So she said instead, and *d'après* of nothing,—

"Do you admire Mrs. Hare very much?"

"Do you?" counter-questioned Mrs. Trevor, turning towards her sharply, and then, as the girl stammered out some platitudes about "supposing she was pretty, or that at least she was considered so," she went on,—

"Prettiness has nothing to do with it. Whatever she was to look at she would always command attention. It is a way she has—a witchery you might call it."

"She has beautiful hair!" said Judith, with enthusiasm.

"Have you never heard it declared that devils affect women with fine hair?" asked Mrs. Trevor.

Judith smiled and shook her head, pleasantly aware of her own advantage in this respect, yet remembering at the same time something similar Winifred had said.

"I really believe there may be something in it, especially as regards that very yellow hair. You scarcely ever hear of dark women being downright wicked!"

"You don't mean to say that she is that?" cried Judith, in an awestruck tone.

"Oh! I am only talking generally, of course, but I would rather be Mrs. Hare's friend than her enemy, and I always meant to warn you if I had a chance. If she thinks she has reason to dislike you, she will make you sorry for it. Take my word for that."

"Why should she dislike me?" tremulously.

"You know best, of course. I don't want to pry into your secrets, but I feel I must put you on your guard. Here we are, and only just in time!"

The train came up to the platform as they entered the station, and they had to hurry to get their tickets and secure their places; while Judith compared this journey with the last she had made, and could scarcely credit the differences there was in comfort.

It was a cold bright day, almost like an English winter morning, and with the slightest suspicion of a frosty bite in the air.

Mr. Sherston had sent his head chuprassie, a gorgeous creature in scarlet and gold, to see them safely off, by whom the crowd of natives were kept at a respectful distance; moreover, there was a tiffin-basket in the carriage with them that contained a dainty luncheon, Mrs. Trevor being one of those luxuriously poor people who always manage to have things nicer than their richer fellows. Though she did not profess to entertain, her little dinners had gained a deservedly high reputation among the young men who were honoured with invitations, and were far more *recherché* in every way than the large parties given by the Commissioner, the General, and other magnates of the station.

They lunched about half-an-hour before reaching their destination, and as Mrs. Trevor nibbled at her sandwiches she broached a subject that was almost as near to Judith's heart as what had been discussed before.

"I thought Winifred never meant to marry?" she hazarded.

"Then I wish she had held to her intention!" remarked Judith, sadly.

"Gracious heavens! why?" not attempting to conceal her horror at the idea.

"Because she cannot care for him: because

he is hateful and will make her unhappy," because—oh! there are a hundred reasons."

"But not one to balance what is an undoubted fact, that marriage is woman's mission, and that it is better for her to marry the wrong person than no one at all. That is, provided, of course, that he does not drink nor beat her!"

"Do you really think that?"

"Indeed I do. I have proved it in my own case!"

Judith's eyes met hers questioningly; and she went on,—

"I don't mind telling you about it, for it is so long ago that all freshness of feeling has worn off, and I almost forgot what it meant to me then. The man I loved did not love me sufficiently to condone one of my many faults. He married someone else, and I followed his example. I won't say that I was rapturously happy just at first, but very soon—an incredibly short time it would seem to you—I grew content, and now I would not change my lot if I could. Perhaps I am unlike other women in this, perhaps only more candid; at any rate, I am quite sure I would rather have died than been an old maid."

"And I," said Judith fervently, "would rather die than marry a man I did not love with all my heart."

Mrs. Trevor looked at her rather curiously.

"Ah! you are one of those finely strung natures who live always at abnormally high pressure; now I am quite satisfied with little pleasures, smaller interests. So long as my dresses fit me tolerably, and there are one or two who think me nicer than anyone else, I never envy anyone; but to be neglected, to have no home, no standing of my own—"

"But Winifred is not like that!" interrupted Judith, in her earnestness not noticing that there was implied condemnation in her speech, as well as contempt in her tones.

Mrs. Trevor, always quick of comprehension, saw it at once, and had the grace to colour with something like confusion; though she answered quietly enough,—

"Are you sure you are not crediting her with some attributes of your own? Now to me she has always seemed so very characterless, and cold—"

"That is only seeming. In reality, she is very warm-hearted, and so true."

"I wonder from which of her parents she inherits these virtues?" observed Mrs. Trevor, with a bitterness of accent that disconcerted Judith, and made her hastily change the conversation.

To speak anything but good of those under whose roof she was would have been impossible to her; she wondered at the want of tact evidenced by such an observation.

Mrs. Trevor may have been conscious of her mistake, for she was very quiet for some time, and every now and then a sudden change of expression came across her face, altering it completely, and ageing it as well.

It might have been difficult before to believe in the forty and odd years she was supposed to have reached, but now that the somewhat stereotyped look of youth and happiness had been displaced by some strong feeling it was easier.

In spite of the trim figure and the veil that was cunningly designed to soften the unbending glare of the midday sun, she looked at that moment every one of the years during which she had lightly skimmed the surface of every emotion, yet, perchance, never gauged the real depth of one.

Nor did she at once regain her ordinarily good spirits; not, in fact, till they had reached Kanowar, and having left the station behind them, found their way to the bazaar. Then the sight of two or three coarse, but aesthetically-coloured cloths aroused her interest, and she was soon heart and soul in her work, penetrating one dirty novel after another in search of art treasures.

Judith, who had commissions to execute for Mrs. Sherston, and had no genius for

bargaining or haggling down, made her way to a large shop at the upper end of the long narrow street, where they professed to have a fixed price, and soon found what she wanted; besides which she subsequently discovered that she had not given more than Mrs. Trevor, a circumstance which disgusted that lady extremely, though she consoled herself by the idea that at least she had had more fun for her money.

They had completed their purchases, and were returning with a coolie carrying the spoil behind them, when they came upon a scene, common enough in the country they were in, but which roused Judith's hottest indignation.

A bullock staggering beneath a weight it could scarcely bear, tortured beyond endurance by the dies that had settled on a raw yoke-gall on its neck, had fallen down, and was being goaded to make impossible efforts to rise by every means that native ingenuity and love of cruelty could suggest.

Its meek white face and patient eyes appealed irresistibly to the girl, who was passionately fond of all animals, and summoning up the best Hindustani she had at her command, she remonstrated with them as well as she could.

A cursory glance having assured the men that she had no means of enforcing her words, they went on stolidly their own way; and at the same moment Mrs. Trevor pulled Judith's sleeve, and begged her to come on, as nothing they could say would do any good.

Neither of them had noticed little Julian, who, with clenched fists and flashing eyes, had watched the course of events; and both were surprised, and certainly alarmed, when a stone from his hand, scientifically directed, went whizzing through the air, and struck the foremost offender on the face.

Judith was too ignorant of the language, too unversed in the customs of the country, to understand the full significance of what followed. She saw Mrs. Trevor catch the child by the hand, and attempt to drag him away; she heard one man ask "by whose order the people were stoned," and all the rest was unintelligible; only the crowd that surrounded them and barred their egress embued her with a sudden dread, that the menacing expression on the dark faces so close to her own did nothing to dispel.

A sharp scream from Mrs. Trevor, who more thoroughly realised the unpleasantness of their position, intensified her terror; and she made a despairing, but ineffectual effort to reach her side, at which those nearest laughed mockingly.

They were all talking at once, all in the same taunting, threatening strain, to judge from their voices, and violent gesticulations; when suddenly a rescuer appeared on the scene, and a commanding voice bidding them at once disperse received immediate attention.

Though the words were Hindustani, Judith guessed the speaker to be an Englishman, and was surprised when she turned to see a tall, fine-looking man in native dress standing at her side.

She was about to thank him as best she could, in the language she believed to be his own, when a second glance showed her that his complexion was quite fair, and his features certainly not of an oriental type.

That he was a countryman of her own she felt convinced, but why should he be masquerading in this garb?

He was a man of middle age, big and broad-shouldered, looking taller than his actual height by reason of the turban that he wore, the long coat over loose white trousers of the Punjabi make; and something in his face struck Judith as strangely familiar.

She tendered her thanks in English, and in the same language beseured her that he was glad to have been of any use; the two remarks taking up less than half a minute, during which Mrs. Trevor came to them, panting still from excitement.

"I never was so frightened in my life," she

began, and then a low cry of recognition burst from her lips, as for the first time she looked her deliverer in the face. That he, too, was affected painfully by the unexpected meeting there could be no doubt. The heavy beard and moustache could only conceal the workings of his lips, not the sudden pallor that spread above, nor the horror in his eyes.

Yet he was the first to recover himself, to break the spell that bound them both, carrying them back in thought through more than twenty years as though they had been only days, and causing every incident that marked their knowledge of each other to pass before them in panoramic rotation.

"Don't you think we had better get out of this?" he asked, with characteristic imperturbability, and instantly all that had been so distinct to Lilian Trevor before faded away; and she remembered that she was in Kanewar bazaar with a man who bore at least the outward semblance of a native.

Goldily she admitted the wisdom of his suggestion, and walked on with head erect, he following, with Judith just half a pace behind him; and she remembered that she was in Kanewar bazaar with a man who bore at least the outward semblance of a native.

Goldily she admitted the wisdom of his suggestion, and walked on with head erect, he following, with Judith just half a pace behind him; and she remembered that she was in Kanewar bazaar with a man who bore at least the outward semblance of a native.

"Our very best thanks for your help," she said, with a frank smile.

He took her small gloved fingers, the colour very noticeable on his rather prominent cheekbones as he did so, and looked down at her for a moment without speaking, though there were a great many words in his eyes.

"I have to thank you," he returned, enigmatically, and with one hasty glance at Mrs. Trevor's averted face turned and walked away, not giving her time to ask his meaning, even had she been so inclined.

Nor did Mrs. Trevor volunteer any information. She expressed a determination never to go into a bazaar again without a man's protection, and reproved Julian gently for his misplaced valour; then relapsed into a troubled silence which Judith was not anxious to break.

She was trying to trace a resemblance in anyone she had ever seen to the man who had only now left them, but the faint clue that was in her brain was only fugitive, and eluded her grasp. Once or twice what she sought for seemed within her reach; then, again, everything became as hazy as it had been before. She was more puzzled than ever to account for the feeling that some time, somewhere, she had seen him before. It was Mrs. Trevor who ultimately made it clear to her at last.

"Don't tell anyone of our adventure, they would only think us foolish and indiscreet for venturing there alone. Above all, you must not tell the Commissioner; he would be very angry," she warned her, as they parted.

Then suddenly it flashed into Judith's mind how once before she had been similarly advised, and the whole thing came back to her at once—how they two had stood together and looked at an album—how her fingers had idly pushed one photograph out of its place and revealed another beneath, the face of a young man and beardless, but otherwise in form and feature the same as that of the man they had so strangely encountered to-day.

CHAPTER XV.

WANTED—A CLUE.

Mr. Johnson proved to be by no means an exigent lover; on the contrary, since he had

won her consent he seemed to avoid his fiancee, and she, instead of resenting his neglect, encouraged it.

The sacrifice being necessary, it was better that its full force and significance should not be made clear to her at once, for to a woman all pain is more bearable when it comes by degrees, and not with the suddenness of a shock.

The one formal caress he had bestowed on her as sign and seal of their betrothal had not been followed by any other similar advances, and though the immunity she enjoyed could only be temporary, since the date of their wedding was already fixed, still she felt grateful for even so short respite.

She made no complaint, scarcely ever spoke of herself in fact, and outwardly was the same as she had always been; but to her father and Judith, the two who understood what cause she had for distress of mind, an alteration was very apparent.

Twenty-two is not very old for a girl who has led a healthy and untroubled life, but in India every year leaves an ineffaceable mark; and though for a while the lines may remain invisible, like that ink which requires to be held to the fire before any writing can be seen, it only needs that one should pass through the furnaces of suffering or sickness for them to stand out so that all who see may read.

So with Winifred. In one day her youth seemed to pass from her, and the effects of having spent so much of her life in a debilitating climate began to show themselves.

The attacks of fever to which she was subject came with greater frequency, leaving her weaker and more listless every time, and at once did the full extent of the change in her become patent to Judith.

They were both in the drawing-room, and though its full length divided them they were reflected side by side, in a long mirror that hung between two window frames—Judith herself tall, strong and radiantly healthy, her beautiful figure shown off to advantage by the close fitting gown she wore; Winifred, plaidly, almost dowdily, dressed, her face looking very pale and thin against the light, her shoulders rounded slightly from constantly stooping—a habit that weakness had latterly confirmed.

Judith's heart was filled with sudden comprehensive pity, and she was about to speak when a movement behind made her start and turn.

It was Mr. Johnson. He had come in unheard by her, and had followed the direction of her glance; probably misunderstanding the thoughts which were aroused by what she saw.

"A contrast, is it not?" he asked, keeping his head turned away, and bending over some books, ostensibly studying their titles, so that his voice should not carry farther than her ear. "Who would guess which was the heiress and which her humble companion?"

"Who said that I was humble?" asked Judith aloud, her flashing eyes giving the lie to any such assertion.

"No one! No one, I assure you. It was a misnomer," he admitted, with twinkling eyes.

"Then please not to credit me with any more virtues I do not possess!" haughtily, as she moved away to where Winifred was.

But at the first sound of Johnson's voice his fiancee had fled; and when Judith discovered that it was so, she felt half inclined to follow, only that pride forbade.

It was the first time she had been alone with the man since that morning when he had declared his mad passion, and she had sent him in anger from her presence.

Though he had hovered about her persistently, and looked his admiration boldly, he had had no opportunity to do more till now, and she felt a little nervous, standing irresolutely in the centre of the room, wondering what it would be best to do.

"Is humility a virtue?" asked Mr. Johnson, still turning over the books with an interest only assumed to reassure her.

"I have never studied the question, nor should I think have you," was the curt reply, her eyes scornfully veiled, the long lashes resting darkly on her flushed cheeks.

"I don't think you have ever done me justice, Miss Holt. Self-confidence—well, self-assertion if you like—is a good fault in a business man, and with me it arises more from custom than conviction; I am not blinded by it. I know how far I have succeeded, in what failed, and having counted the cost can honestly declare that I would give up much that I have gained to secure what is denied me yet."

"You speak in enigmas," coldly.

"You can have the key to the solution if you choose."

"I have not the slightest curiosity, I assure you," with haste, as, the fiction of the books abandoned, he came over to her side.

He looked at her for some time in silence, trying to read something of her thoughts, but the careless pride with which she met his gaze defied him.

When annoyed or in doubt he had a habit of looking down his nose, and then beyond it into space, which amounted nearly to a squint, and gave him for the moment a most Mephistophelean expression.

That it was so now he seemed aware, and passed his hand over his face once or twice, from brow to chin, before he said quietly,—

"I wish you would trust me. I might be able to help you, if you would."

"Why should you think I am in need of help?"

"Because I have eyes in my head, and a sincere sympathy that makes my vision clearer; though I should be blind, indeed, if I could not see that you are immeasurably above the situation you hold now."

"I am not the only lady who earns her own living."

"I daresay not, but they have not all your face, your figure, nor the many nameless fascinations that go to make you what you are. It is from choice you are here. I wonder why?"

"You cannot surely expect me to gratify your curiosity. Neither my actions nor the motives that cause them can concern you, any more than your movements can interest me."

She spoke insolently, wishing to crush him with her scorn, but, to her surprise, instead of looking annihilated, an expression of actual relief crossed his face.

"Pardon me," he said politely, "the two cases admit of no comparison. There is nothing in me that is interesting, nor out of the common; but you are very different, and I confess I would like to know what brought you out to this country!"

"A very ordinary motive—want of money," she condescended to inform him.

"Yet you don't look poor," letting his eye travel from her proudly-poised head to the tip of her daintily embroidered shoes.

"That is a thing that grows upon you; it does not come at once. It takes time to make a ruin, and we have hardly begun to realise our poverty as yet."

"We," he emphasised. "Then you are not alone in this world? You have brothers, sisters, perhaps?"

"There is only my father and myself."

Seating herself near the window she took up the newspaper and opened it leisurely, appearing to peruse its pages, with an idea of showing him that she was not desirous of prolonging the conversation. The hint, however, was disregarded.

"And was it at his wish—your father's wish—that you came out here?" he asked, fixing his glance upon her face; from which it might have seemed that the question was not objectless.

"You are very curious, Mr. Johnson," remarked Judith, turning over the paper impatiently.

"That is an unkind way of describing the interest I take in you," reproachfully.

"Did you expect me to feel flattered?" with a slight curling of her lips.

"I expect nothing from you, but would give you all—though Winifred Sherston is to be my wife—"

He was speaking earnestly and with some eloquence, but with a superb indignant gesture Judith rose to her feet.

"You forget that you are speaking to Winifred Sherston's friend," she said, and went past him, holding back her gown lest it should touch him, so intense was her disgust.

Finding herself on the verandah she paused doubtfully, a little amused smile on her mouth, as it struck her how narrow is the border-land that divides high and fine feelings from an anti-climax of bathos.

To remain there with nothing to do, and with the chance of his following her, would be ridiculous; to go back impossible. Yet to go round two sides of the house in the hot sun, without a hat, would certainly excite comment if anyone should see her, and, moreover, might be dangerous as well.

As she hesitated, Colonel Lea-Creagh appeared round the corner, and his coming was such an easy way out of the difficulty that she welcomed him with more than ordinary cordiality.

Nor was he slow to appreciate the favour shown. As he took her hand in his he pressed it gently, and his face became more vacuous than ever in its expression, by reason of the childlike smile in which he thought fit to wreath it.

According to custom he said little, trusting to admiring glances to carry him through any awkward pause, but these now were almost undistinguishable from the mass of flesh in which they were imbedded; indeed, nothing could be seen but a few light eyelashes, and the smiles which were nearly as broad as his face.

At any other time Judith must have laughed to see him, her sense of humour being always inconveniently keen, but just then she was feeling very serious, very determined.

"I went to the other door, but found no one there, so ventured to come round," he observed, bringing out the apology he had prepared to meet the case, though vanity hinted that it was not, after all, required.

"I am very glad to see you!" declared Judith with misleading truthfulness, as she showed the way indoors.

The drawing room was empty; and glancing at the clock Judith saw that it wanted a quarter of an hour to tea time, when the family usually assembled there. It would be a good opportunity to put a question that had long been in her mind to ask.

"Mr. Johnson was here just now. I wonder where he has gone?" she remarked, carelessly, as they sat down.

"I daresay he will return," said the Colonel, still beaming.

Judith, too impatient to take any circuitous route to the end she had in view, asked abruptly,

"Does he remind you of anyone you ever knew?"

Now Colonel Lea-Creagh, though a great ladies' man, a term which, as a rule, presupposes not very marked intellectual faculties, was by no means a fool where they were not concerned. Indeed, in all business matters and affairs connected with his regiment he was particularly shrewd; he understood at once now that Judith had some motive for her inquiry, and though he knew no reason for withholding anything he knew, natural cautiousness prompted him to answer guardedly.

"What makes you ask me such a question?"

He was not smiling now, he looked quite as grave as she; and gaining more confidence from his altered manner Judith answered impulsively,—

"Because I heard that you had said you believed you had seen him before under a different name. Because Winifred Sherston

is my dearest friend, and I would do anything to save her from marriage with that man."

"And you want me to help you?"

"I would be very grateful if you would."

The Colonel looked thoughtfully in front of him for a few moments without saying more; then, with an air of one who has weighed a matter and come to a resolution, he observed,—

"I see no reason why I should not tell you frankly what were my suspicions, though I must warn you, at the same time, that they may be utterly groundless. I have thought the man's voice was strangely familiar, and he has certain tricks of expression that I vaguely remember; yet it is quite possible I may be mistaken. The man of whom I am reminded I have not seen for over twenty years, and the last place where he would be likely to appear is here."

"Will you tell me his name?" asked Judith eagerly.

It was Michael Straughan. He was a subordinate in Mr. Sherston's office, and the reason that I remember him was that he was accused of having taken bribes from the Rajah of Chahpore, and made off before the case came on. It caused a great commotion at the time, and at first Mr. Sherston was supposed to be implicated, but this he effectively disproved, and did his best to trace the real culprit. That is why it is impossible Mr. Johnson could be the same man, even if he were not dark, while Straughan was as red-headed a Scotsman as you could ever wish to see."

"Did anyone else here know him—the clerk, I mean?"

Colonel Lea-Creagh shook his head.

"Twenty-three years is a long time—long enough for a great many to retire, and more to die. There is no one here who knew the man Straughan except Mrs. Trevor, and she sees no resemblance. I asked her, and she rather laughed at me. She did not much like talking about it either, for in those days the Commissioner was very sweet upon her; and had she played her cards better she would have been mistress here now."

"And there is no one else?"

"No one, except—"

He stopped awkwardly, conscious of broaching a subject that was best left undiscussed.

"Except?" repeated Judith, lifting her bright blue eyes to his face and keeping them there, till one by one every scruple was demolished.

"Well, the Commissioner had a brother then, who knew him too."

"And he is dead?"

Colonel Lea-Creagh thoughtfully examined the inside of his hat for some seconds before replying.

"Well, yes; practically he is dead—dead to all of us without doubt. He came to grief very badly; it was a disgraceful affair, in fact. The story is not fit for ladies' ears, but the long and short of it is that he has forgotten he is an Englishman, and at this present moment he is living in some bazaar just as though he were born and bred a native."

Every word, one after another, had been slowly dragged from him against his will, against every feeling of what was right and proper for him to say. It was impossible to resist the girl's compelling gaze, and indeed, a man is generally powerless when a woman chooses to put in exercise the wiles with which nature or art has endowed her.

As he spoke his last words he was startled by a low cry of sudden intelligence that broke from Judith's lips.

It was as though out of utter darkness she was suddenly translated into bright light, as something of what had puzzled her before in a moment became clear.

Rising, she crossed the room, and taking the album she had looked through with Mrs. Trevor, she brought it to him and turned to the leaf on which was the Commissioner's likeness. This she slipped down and disclosed the one beneath.

"Is that Mr. Sherston's brother?" she asked, in a low, intense voice.

For the moment Colonel Lea-Creagh could only gaze entranced at the beautiful face uplifted to his, as all unconscious of him or of anything but the one fixed idea she knelt beside him, and waited for him to speak; bringing down her delicate brows into a decided frown when he did not at once look where she directed. Only slowly he obeyed the movement of her hand and eyes; but as he looked at the pictured face of the man who had once been his friend—his equal—and was now lower than the very beggars in England—for these, however desperate might be their circumstances, still maintained to some extent the traditions of their birth and nationality, and in spite of poverty could live in decency and self-respect—his expression changed.

"How do you know who that is?" he asked, sharply.

"Because I have seen him, spoken to him," she answered.

Before he could make any further comment the door opened, and then conversation was naturally at an end.

It was only Winifred, for which Judith was very grateful, as she rose hurriedly to her feet. It would have been a serious matter had Mrs. Sherston discovered her in such a confidential and unconventional attitude; as it was she did not escape some harmless joking.

"Did you think it was Leap Year, or is Colonel Lea-Creagh very backward in coming forward?" Winifred asked, when they were alone.

But Judith shook her head, and declined to explain the situation.

"Let us manage it in our own way," she cried, lightly; "I warn you I will be married before you yet!"

"Then you must make the most of your time," with a little sad smile.

"It is two months yet, and a great deal can be done in two months," was the oracular reply.

Yet though she spoke hopefully, and felt very certain that she was on the high road to success, subsequent consideration showed her that she had, after all, made no great progress; indeed, had rather wandered off the original path in her desire for knowledge.

What information she had gained was all in disjointed scraps; it required a clue to piece and make them fit in with each other.

(To be continued.)

A NEW kind of glass has been invented in Sweden which is asserted to possess wonderful microscopic powers. While the highest power of an old-fashioned microscopic lens reveals only the 1,400,000 part of an inch, this new glass will enable us to distinguish 1,204,700 part of an inch.

A CIVILISED society exists on an artificial level, says a well known professor. The domestic animals which we use are not the ones which Nature gave us. They have been brought by the labour and ingenuity of man so far away from their original type that we do not always know what the latter was. The grains, fruits and vegetables which we eat are not any which Nature gave us. We have transformed them out of all semblance to their original types. The clothes which we wear were never given to us by Nature. Between anything given by Nature and the shoes, hats, coats, and dresses which we wear, lies a history of thousands of years of labour, experiment, ingenuity and caprice. Our houses were not given to us by Nature. A modern house has a history thousands of years long when we call to mind the steps of invention and experiment, and the thousand converging lines of discovery and invention of details, which have gone to make it. The whole environment of a civilised man is artificial.

DULCE'S INHERITANCE.

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CHAPTER XI.

The words seemed burnt into poor Nina's brain. "Her friend is missing." It was cruel, she thought, to have told so much, and yet so little.

"Missing!"

The word was so terribly vague and indefinite. Only one thing—she felt sure Dulce was in trouble.

Mr. Delamere watched her face anxiously. He was a young man apt to form rapid judgments, and he had decided already Nina Dalton was no weak character. Her conduct now confirmed this view. One smothered sob, and she was calm and collected, though terribly pale and anxious.

"You seem almost to have expected this?" said the Vicar of St. Gertrude's, when they were on their way to London Bridge, for he insisted on seeing her into the train. "Were you prepared for it?"

Nina shook her head.

"I felt as I came away yesterday I was leaving Dulce in danger, yet it was for her sake I had to come, but my fears took another turn. I dreaded that by some treachery she might be induced to promise to marry Noel Bertram."

"That promise would have been void when she found out that he was a pretender. Miss Dalton, I can't understand the wording of this telegram 'Missing!'" Why doesn't the doctor say she has gone away? That must be what he means, and it would have been far less alarming!"

Dulce shook her head; the problem seemed beyond her.

"You will let me know how you find things?" said the Vicar, eagerly, as he bade her goodbye; "and, Miss Dalton, believe me, I sympathise with your grief most truly."

"You never saw her!" said Nina, mournfully. "She was the sweetest creature I ever knew—so gentle and yielding. Everyone loved Dulce!"

Mr. Delamere thought, as he travelled back to the far East, there was something to his mind more beautiful than the charms of the unknown Dulce in Nina's own unselfishness and devotion to her friend.

He put Miss Dalton down as a humble companion to the heiress, and admired her faithful affection and bright, daring spirit rather more than he had admired anything beyond the parish of St. Gertrude's for years.

Poor Nina! The train was a fast one, and yet it seemed to her impatience positively to crawl along, but at last she found herself at the familiar rustic station, and Dr. Drake on the platform awaiting her.

One look into his face, and she knew there was no clue to Dulce even before he said, gravely—

"This is an awful thing, Nina. The Vicar is ready to tear his hair with remorse that he would not take your warning!"

In spite of the load at her heart Nina was sensible of a thrill of triumph as she recollects Mr. Bengough's false accusation of herself.

"He believes now, then, that Noel Bertram was unworthy of Dulce?" she asked, quietly.

"Yes. I forgot to ask how you have sped, but, my dear, even if you have no proofs of his baseness, you will find Dulce's trustees ready to believe your suspicions!"

"I have enough proof," said Nina, slowly. "I was at his wife's death-bed last night. He is no more Noel Bertram than you are!"

But the horror and dismay on the doctor's face overwhelmed her even before he said,—

"His wife! Dulce is with him. We thought he had taken her off to force her into a secret marriage; but if he is married it is worse even than I feared!"

"His wife died last night," said Nina; "but no one's fortune could be worse for

Dulce than to link her fate with his. Tell me everything, Dr. Drake. You will keep nothing back. The Vicar would torture me with his long explanations, and Mr. Clinton has no feeling. You understand me, and will tell the story plainly."

"My poor girl, there is very little to tell. They went out dining yesterday afternoon, and have not returned."

"But the servants?"

"It was the pony carriage, and he drove himself. There was not even a boy behind!"

"And has nothing been done?" asked Nina, strangely. "Surely you have not all sat down with folded hands, and left Dulce to his mercy?"

"You are too hard, Nina!" said the doctor, gently. "Some of us loved her as well as you do. A great deal has been done. Her description is at every railway station within twenty miles of Highshire, with a reward for her discovery, and a bill warning all clergymen, registrars, and others against solemnizing any marriage between her and her companion, as she is under age. Clinton says the ponies will lead to their discovery sooner than anything. They were beautifully-marked chestnuts, and well known for miles."

"My poor Dulce!" and Nina's tears flowed hot and fast. "He will make her marry him, I see."

"My good child," said the doctor, gravely, "what good will it do him, if he is not Noel Bertram? He can't enjoy Stoneleigh by marrying Dulce."

"No; but he would have five hundred a-year for life. A very comfortable income for a man who, a little while ago, was earning three pounds a week—and that with difficulty."

The doctor opened his eyes.

"I begin to understand. While I thought him the true Bertram it puzzled me why he should be so anxious to marry her, since he would be just as rich without her. Now I know he is an impostor it's clear enough. Five hundred a-year is worth fighting for!"

"It is dreadful!" said Nina, slowly. "His wife has believed him dead for four years. No wonder he refused to go and see her."

"How could she ask him to go and see her if she believed him dead?"

"Don't you understand? When he went on the stage he took her brother's name; thought, I suppose, it sounded more romantic than 'Brown.' The poor girl saw Noel Bertram on the play-bills, and believed it was her brother. She tried to see him, but he always evaded her, and when others urged her request he declared he had no sister. Of course he dared not come near her, or she would have claimed him as her husband!"

"And she is the real Noel Bertram's sister?"

"Yes."

"Did you see her?"

"I did. She had a sweet, sad face, and she was a lady. She spoke of her brother as though he had been a hero. He had been her protector and guardian from childhood. When he went out to the East as newspaper correspondent he left her at school; thence she elapsed with Mr. Brown."

"And where is he now?"

"I don't know," said Nina, slowly. And then the strangest idea came into her head. "Dr. Drake," she said, enthusiastically, "last Saturday a stranger came to Highshire. He saw both me and Dulce; we met him at the Vicar's. He said he had met Mr. Stone abroad, and also knew Noel Bertram (the supposed one). We could not persuade him to come to Stoneleigh, and renew the acquaintance. He said our guest had robbed him of something he greatly valued. Dulce thought they had been rivals, and Mr. Bertram had distanced him; but might he not be the real Noel Bertram, and the loss his sister?"

Dr. Drake looked mystified.

"Do you mean the gentleman staying at the Stoneleigh Arms?" he demanded.

"Yes; he took rooms for a month."

"And did not occupy them a week. When he came back from town yesterday he met the Earl at the station. It seems Lord Raymond had heard from the Vicar of his arrival, and that his name was Adair. It did not take long for them to understand each other. I believe Lord Raymond was so struck by the resemblance to his mother he would hardly look at such things as certificates of birth, &c. Anyway, he's at Raymond Hall now, and his aunt and uncle look as proud as though they had come into a fortune."

"I believe he is the man Mr. Stone knew as Noel Bertram. And I believe he is in love with Dulce!"

Dr. Drake opened his eyes.

"My dear, I thought you said he only came to Highshire on Saturday?"

"So did."

"And he was away from Monday till yesterday, when she was missing. At the very most they can only have had two days of each other's society. How can he have fallen in love with her?"

"I don't think they had much more than two hours," said Nina, gravely. "But that sort of thing doesn't take long."

They were at Stoneleigh by this time. Nina checked the poor Vicar's apology in the bud.—

"Don't say a word, Mr. Bengongh. You were taken with the man, and so any distrust of mine seemed to you idle prejudice. We need never think of your mistake again."

The news changed the face of things considerably. Both Dulce's trustees had been inclined to make the best of her absence. The young man was desperately in love with her, and only by marrying him could she keep her wealth.

Although admitting he had been most inconsiderate and rash, still, on the whole, they had been ready to forgive him. But Nina's story changed their simple disapproval to burning wrath.

"It is the most barefaced imposture I ever heard of!" said Mr. Clinton. "How he could have conceived it I can't imagine. I never was so taken in before. And he went to work so cautiously too. I remember his saying the first time I saw him 'I am a Noel Bertram. I don't say I am the one you want.' He was cautious as an old offender. This story explains what puzzled me more than all—why he sat so long elapse before answering the advertisement! He said he never saw it. But I couldn't quite believe that."

"Everything played into his hands. The real man was absent. None of us had ever seen him. To certain extent their past history was the same. Both had lived in Paris till the war—both were about the same age. Yes," summed up the Vicar, sadly, "it was all made easy for him. The only point that aroused our suspicions (his not having the diamond ring) he contrived to explain away."

Enter the butler, bearing a card and a tiny parcel.

The three gentlemen were sitting in the library, and Nina with them.

Mrs. Leslie had retired to bed; she was wont so to do when anything troubled her. I am not sure but what she showed a certain amount of wisdom by this habit, for she at least relieved her friends of the sight of her tearful face and the sound of dismal predictions.

She was one of those women utterly useless in an emergency, who always cry at the slightest opportunity, and take the gloomiest view possible of every occurrence.

"The gentleman is waiting, sir," said Giles to Mr. Clinton, as he handed his charge.

The card was endorsed: "Noel Bertram Denis Adair." The packet, on being opened, was found to contain a diamond ring bearing John Stone's crest and motto, and a few lines in a clear, bold hand.

"The enclosed was given to me nearly seven years ago in Paris; it has never left my possession since. When I made a fortune there seemed no need to continue to hide the

family name my father had dropped as unsuited to his poverty; so for the last five years I have been generally known as Mr. Adair. I never dreamed that poor Mr. Stone had mentioned me in his will, or that trouble could possibly arise from my dropping the name of Bertram.

"Last Saturday I came to Highshire and intended to call on Mr. Stone. I learned, to my sorrow, of his death; and, to my amazement, that an impostor had appeared and claimed to be the youth to whom he showed such kindness long ago in Paris. I hardly knew what to do. I had no desire to rob Miss Stone of the wealth rightfully hers.

"I heard she was to decide whether she would marry the supposed 'Noel Bertram' in a few days; and as my aunt, Lady Raymond, seemed certain of her refusal it seemed best for me to await her rejection of her suitor before I discovered his fraud.

"I now regret most deeply the delay, and I offer myself earnestly to assist you in the terrible consequences that have occurred."

Of course there was but one answer. Mr. Adair was begged to join the consultation. When he came in Nina knew by one glance at his face her fancy was correct.

He had fallen in love with golden-haired Dulce. It was her unknown fate which had given him that troubled, anxious look. Well, he was worthy of her, as far as eyes could tell; but, oh why had he not revealed himself sooner in time for the poor girl who lay in her coffin in far off Whitechapel.

He shook hands with each of the group and then said, gravely,—

"You have almost a right to demand why I did not at once expose the fraud practised upon you. Nathaniel Brown—that is the man's real name—had the happiness of one very dear to me in his power. He enticed my only sister away from school, and married her when she was seventeen.

"I have never ceased trying to find her since; at first by deputy, latterly, since my return from Africa, in person. I have spent hundreds in the effort to find her and convince myself she was happy, but I never came on the least clue, until Miss Dalton told me last Saturday of the impostor at Stoneleigh. I knew there was only one man in the world who was aware of Mr. Stone's acquaintance with me, and I felt sure I had found my brother-in-law.

"Hearing he was in London I went up too, trying to discover whether the people who knew him as 'Noel Bertram' had ever heard of his wife. I was assured on all hands he was a single man. I began to fear my little sister must be dead, and, much as I longed to fly at him and give him his deserts, I felt my surest way of discovering her fate was to wait until Miss Stone had spoken her choice; then, when she had refused him, I thought I could make news of Ivy the price of my abstaining from prosecuting him."

Nina looked up gravely.

"Mr. Adair, she wrote to you over and over again, until she died. I think she never quite gave up the hope of your forgiveness."

"I never had a letter from her since her marriage! But, Miss Dalton, you speak as if you had known her. And you say until she died. Do you mean all is over?"

"She died last night," said Nina, gently; "and I was with her. She seemed quite peaceful and happy."

"And he was there?"

"He! He had left her to think him dead for years!" said Nina, indignantly, and then she turned from the subject of poor Ivy to the girl yet alive to suffer and to fear.

"It was half past three yesterday when they drove away, and a boy saw the carriage on the road to the Demon's Cave. That is the last clue."

"Dandy and Flirt were very fresh," said the Vicar, thoughtfully. "There is no doubt they would be able to go twenty miles, or even further. But, then, where could they go? We have been to every railway station within

reach, and no one answering to their description has been seen. I think the man was villain enough for anything; but he had nothing to gain by taking Dulce's life, and it would be taking it if he exposed her to a night in the open air at this season."

"He was a stranger to the county," said Mr. Clinton. "He had never been in Highshire until this month, so that he could know nothing of the locality."

Mr. Adair shook his head.

"You are out there, sir. Until he was twelve years old he lived with his father, Lord Raymond's bailiff, and he knew every acre of ground for miles. It was only a well-to-do relation in Paris offering to pay for his schooling there which took him abroad. All his childhood was spent in this neighbourhood. It is wonderful to me how he escaped recognition!"

"He always kept himself very much aloof from the villagers," reflected the Vicar. "And then, you know, it would have been presumptuous to their minds to think of him, their future landlord, as resembling a labourer's son (old Brown was nothing but a labourer originally). I remember someone remarked to me he had quite the Highshire accent, but I laughed at the bare idea."

"We had better sconce the county," returned Denis Adair, simply. "To my belief, we shall find them at some roadside inn or small farmhouse. Miss Stone looked terribly delicate, and as likely as not the fatigue and agitation would make her really ill for the time being. Brown would be able to pass her off as his sister, and tell whatever story suited him to account for their being in such a plight."

"Then you don't think there is any immediate danger?" said Nina, imploringly.

He knew of what she meant.

"Of their marriage? No. It would take them days before it could be celebrated, even by licence; and I trust before that to have your friend safe here."

"But how?" asked Nina, "how?"

Deep down in her heart was another fear. Would not the fact of her mysterious disappearance—of her having, so to say, left her home in this man's company—be a terrible weapon in Mr. Brown's hands against Dulce? Might he not tell her her reputation was lost if she did not return to Stoneleigh a wedded wife.

Mr. Adair looked at Nina anxiously; the same thought had entered his mind, but he was quick to cheer her.

"Remember, Miss Dalton, Brown gains nothing unless the marriage is legal. He would have to wait till he heard of poor Ivy's death. Believe me, if only we are prompt, we shall save her yet."

"Poor child!" commented the Vicar, "she seems born to a sea of trouble. What with her father suddenly coming to life——"

"What!" exclaimed Adair. "Denzil Netherton alive! Well, he can't want his daughter, that's one comfort."

"Why not?" asked Hubert Clinton. "To my mind, he can be a very terrible annoyance to her."

"He has done too many dark deeds for that," returned Adair. "I know his foreign alias well, and that the Paris police would be remarkably glad to have him in their safe keeping. If he troubles Miss Stone I shall know how to manage him."

Nina sat facing the window. She did not know why, but it was a kind of consolation to her to be able to see the broad, smooth path which led up to the porticoed entrance.

She did not expect to see Dulce's weary steps toiling along it, nor yet to see Nathaniel Brown driving up to the door with a leer of triumph; but yet it was a kind of dreary satisfaction to her to sit so as to see it.

She turned her head quietly as the last words were spoken, and rushed from the room.

Denis Adair looked out and saw a small, remarkably ragged little boy walking leisurely.

along; but for the anxiety at his heart he would have smiled at poor Nina's pinning her hopes on such a messenger. But before he could have believed it Nina was back in the room dragging the boy by his coat-collar, and commanding him to speak in such imperative tones that she scattered what little brains he in general possessed.

"Gently," said Denis, softly. "You are only terrifying him. Look here, my boy, as Nina was at last persuaded to release her captive, "who sent you here? Have you any message?"

"Weren't trespassing," whined the lad, dejectedly. "The master told me to come, and she flew at me as though I'd been a tramp!"

He looked so very much like one that had Nina nearly throttled him, only on that ground, she could hardly have been to blame; but Denis understood the wounded pride, and explained to the young gentleman, with a patience which well nigh exasperated Nina, that no one thought him a tramp, but the lady was very anxious for news of a friend of hers, and when she saw a stranger she thought he must have brought it. The youth, much mollified, then condescended to speak, but so slowly that Nina would gladly have shaken him.

"The master's a stone-digger, and was working the quarry by Bunter's Hill nigh the Demon's Cave."

Poor Nina! In pity to her Mr. Adair tried to hasten this most dilatory of messengers.

"And you met somebody who told you to come here?"

"Nothing o' the sort. When we got to work this morning we saw something dark down the bottom o' the quarry, but on course we could do nothing without ropes."

Nina had buried her face in her hands.

"Did you come here for ropes?" demanded Denis, who was beginning to hate this youth almost as much as poor impetuous Nina.

"No! Master brought 'em at dinner hour and he let me down, and sure a carriage and horses is a lying at the bottom and a man too. The carriage is smashed to bits and the horses are dead; but the man's alive—that is—he was them—and groaned horrid, and he just said the one word, 'Stoneleigh.' The master's down there now a taken care of him, and he sent me off here, never thinking as how ye'd set on me for a tramp."

There was but one thought in all breasts—Dulcie.

"You are sure there was only a man at the bottom of the quarry?" demanded Mr. Adair. "You didn't see anyone else?"

"Yes, a carriage and two horses

"But not a lady?"

The boy shook his head.

"No!"

It was a proud day in Job Trotter's life, for when the carriage came round he was desired to mount on the box next the coachman. Dr. Drake and Mr. Adair went of necessity—the one to assist the sufferer, the other to identify him; but Mr. Clinton and the Vicar remained behind. Nina begged to be taken. If—as they hoped—the dying man were able to speak, and revealed what he had done with Dulcie, she would be on the way to her friend. So leaving the two trustees, who had been so completely hoodwinked, to discuss the new aspect of affairs, the carriage drove off with its load.

No one spoke, all had food for thought. Nina felt deeply thankful some one had come to her friend's fate. Denis Adair was wondering how he could meet the man who had stolen his sister, and appropriated his name and fortune; and the kind old doctor, looking at the two eager, resolute faces beside him, marvelled—as indeed he had done a dozen times before—how, in this marrying age, no man had been found to discover the merits and charms of his favorite Nina.

It was nine miles, but the horses were fresh; and the coachman, who loved his

young mistress dearly, exerted them to the utmost, so that they were very quick in reaching the stone quarry. A respectable labourer was there waiting for them. He said he and his partner had done their best, but the poor gentleman breathed his last a few minutes after the boy started.

"And he said nothing?" asked Nina, passionately.

"Your pardon, miss, he said a lot. I never saw such a death before, and I pray I never may again. It was all for pardon—pardon. He was crying out for some one called Ivy to come to him, and just before the end he grew more reasonable, and begged me to send to Stoneleigh. This is just the best thing for them," he said, poor fellow, "I've ruined their carriage, and the ponies are dead; but they'll find what they want at Pear Tree Farm!"

The intense thankfulness on Nina's face went to the man's heart.

"I know this place well, missis, and so I went up to the Farm, and there I found out right enough a young lady had been taken late last night. She seemed very ill, and the kind old dame put her to bed. The gentleman with her said he'd drive on to the inn. It stands just the other side o' the quarry, and come back in the morning. It was a dark night, and he must have missed his way. The ponies dashed over the edge, and then death was pretty certain. The only wonder is it wasn't sooner!"

"And she is at the Farm?"

"Sure, yes, missis, I'll take you there myself, and then come back to take the gentleman's orders about the poor fellow yonder."

Nina's sorrows seemed over when she was kneeling beside the white lavender-scented bed where Dulcie slept the sleep of exhaustion. Dame White, mistress of the Farm, the kindest of good Samaritans, listened eagerly to all. She thought it needful to say that her friend had been driven farther than she wished, and they had been most anxious about her.

"Aye! I thought there was something wrong by the way she clung to me, and asked me to send her home. She seemed half stupefied. I think he'd given her something to make her sleep. She was quite unconscious. When he brought her here he said he was her husband!"

"He wanted to be! She is Miss Stone, of Stoneleigh, and he wanted to marry her!"

"I'd not trust a lass of mine to his bold face," said the dame; then adding, in a kinder key, "but they tell me he's gone to his last account, and one man can't speak harshly of the dead."

When Dulcie opened her eyes at sunset that afternoon they were full of terrified expectations, which gradually died out as she recognised her friend.

"Nina, how did you come? Was it all a terrible dream? Didn't he run away with me?"

Nina kissed her.

"You are quite safe, Dulcie. You will never see him again, dear!"

"But Nina!" and the fair face was crimsoned. "He said I could never hold up my head again—that every one would look down on me after this unless I married him."

"That was an idle threat, dear! Why, you only left home in the afternoon, and by eight you were safe with good Mrs. White."

"And who brought you here?"

"Dr. Drake!"

Dulcie gave a sigh of unspeakable content, and dropped into another slumber. When the doctor saw her he said it would be days before she had the strength to move herself and go about as usual. The opiate had been a very powerful one, and the doses of it considerable. She and Nina must make up their minds to stay quite a week at Pear Tree Farm, if their kind hostess would keep them; and as Mrs. White was only too willing, it was a fortnight after Denis Adair's arrival in Highshire that the young mistress of Stone-

leigh and her friend re-entered its cheerful walls.

By then the tragedy of the stone quarry was world-wide property. It was known from end to end of England that the man who had claimed to be John Stone's heir and his daughter's lover had come to an untimely end while endeavouring to run off with her. The efforts of her friends had speedily recovered her, and now he who had so troubled the peace of Stoneleigh slept in his grave, and this handsome grave-faced man, with dark eyes and earnest expression, was known to be not only the heir of the eccentric millionaire, but also Lord Raymond's nephew, and the future Earl.

Dulcie was spared as many of the details as possible. They never told her the story of poor loving-hearted Ivy. She only heard that Nathaniel Brown had been Mr. Adair's fellow-clerk in Paris, and so had been able to represent him.

Mr. Adair went to London, and chose a pretty grave at Highgate Cemetery for his sister. He thanked the Doocots, with tears in his eyes, for their goodness to her, and shook hands with them as though they had been, as they put it, "real ladies;" but he did not offer them a present, which their neighbours wondered at, but they declared was treating them more like flesh and blood.

However, the day after Ivy's funeral, which he had attended with them, the young dressmakers were surprised by another visit from Mr. Adair.

He said very simply he could never forget their kindness to his sister, and he had wondered what gift would best express his gratitude. His uncle had instructed him to offer them a lodge on the Raymond Estate, with an annuity of fifty pounds a year.

The sisters protested they had done nothing to deserve it, and that fifty pounds a year was more than they could spend; but the thought of country air and spring flowers was too much for them.

They yielded to his entreaties, and henceforth Blackman's row knew them no more. As for Mr. Clinton, his self-satisfaction had received such a bitter blow that he seemed quite a different man.

In vain Denis Adair—the person most concerned—assured him it was a most natural mistake, and the astutest lawyer might well have been taken in by it.

The solicitor still seemed depressed.

"I feel like a simpleton, Mr. Adair. Do you know I actually tried to persuade my ward to marry him? Actually told her it was her duty."

"I am very glad she didn't obey you!"

Mr. Clinton looked at him strangely.

"Oh!"

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing!"

Dulcie smiled.

"You are her guardian still; and, Mr. Clinton, if you think—mind, I do not—you owe me a service for believing in poor Browne, why, then you will advise your ward to marry the real Bertram as earnestly as you did the pretender."

"You will be an English peer. Your own fortune, even, without Lord Raymond's savings, is considerable. Do you really want to marry Denzil Netherton's daughter?"

"Oh, I have settled that gentleman nicely. I am going to allow him five hundred a year so long as he never enters his daughter's presence or seeks to communicate with her in any way!"

"But even then the connection exists. You ought to look much higher!"

Dulcie smiled.

"I have loved her ever since I saw her. To me she will never seem Denzil Netherton's daughter, but the child whom John Stone loved so devotedly. I would give up every advantage I possess—all my wealth, present and to come, rather than the chance of winning Dulcie."

"And you have told her so?"



["LOCK HERE, MY BOY," DENIS SAID, SOFTLY, "WHO SENT YOU HERE? HAVE YOU ANY MESSAGE?"]

Denis shook his head.

"She has been so pestered with talk about marriage these last six months she must be weary of the subject. She is going abroad with my uncle and aunt very soon. When they come back I shall try my fortune."

"Does Miss Dalton accompany them?"

Time had gone on now, and it was June. Mr. Delamere had astonished Dr. Drake intensely by inviting himself on a visit to "recruit his health." He spent a parson's fortnight in Highgate after Easter, and Denis Adair took a very great fancy to him, which did not at all decrease when he understood the young clergyman's real name.

He smiled at Mr. Clinton's question.

"My aunt has begged Miss Dalton for her company, and I believe Dulce has implored it, but she is inexorable. She talks of becoming a Sister of Mercy."

"Nonsense!"

"The love affairs are not progressing favourably," said Denis, with a smile.

"I thought she was far too sensible to have any!"

"She is head over ears in love with a most worthy man, who fully reciprocates her affection, but they neither of them have the least idea of it."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Clinton again.

"A fact, I assure you! Miss Dalton thinks she likes him very much as a friend. He feels sure she is just the companion he needs in his good works. I suppose some day or other they will discover that both their sentiments are really described by a very simple little word of four letters."

"Well, she can afford to please herself; she has fifteen hundred a year in her own right."

"And he thinks she has not a penny; believes she is Dulce's humble companion, and she won't let any of us undeceive him."

But when Dulce and her friends had fairly started on their foreign tour, Nina, finding Dalton House unusually uncongenial, went

up to London—neither to an hotel nor to fashionable friends, but to board with an old governess who had a large house in Bedford-square, a few rooms of which she reserved for herself.

Dr. Drake, who was as keen-sighted for love affairs as Denis Adair, wrote to his cousin that he feared Miss Dalton had felt her friend's departure very much, and she had come to London to seek some fresh object for her energies. This was perfectly true; but worded in the doctor's quaint English it read as though Nina had been left homeless and unemployed, and really needed a fresh situation.

Mr. Delamere understood it in this light. He had always advocated the celibacy of the clergy until he met Nina, but she had shaken his views. He remembered one of the earliest texts in the Bible declared "It is not good for man to be alone." He was often tired and disheartened with his engrossing work; surely Nina's bright companionship would be a valuable boon; and she was so cheerful and tender-hearted he could not bear to think of her wearing out her youth in other people's homes. He thought Miss Stone had behaved most ungratefully to her. He might as well go and call on her.

And the call ended in his asking the most important question a man can put to a woman, and Nina said "Yes"—content, indeed, to have now the love of such a man.

What he said when he discovered she was an heiress never transpired. Nina admitted he was nearly angry. Perhaps he concluded he had gone too far to draw back. Perhaps he thought St. Gertrude's would be benefited; certainly the discovery made no difference to the engagement.

Lady Dalton was furious, and went off to Baden on purpose to make her daughter uncomfortable; but as the Earl and Countess of Raymond had returned home, she did not at all inconvenience Nina, for her dear old friends declared she must come to them until

she was married, and have the ceremony from their house.

Mr. Delamere had no time for courtship, so the wedding was to be soon—in August, a month dear to the clergy for such occasions, I imagine, because there are no church festivals then to claim their time. The Vicar of St. Gertrude's objected to lace and satin on principle, but Nina had a white gown and orange blossoms, and so was not without the adjuncts of a bride's triumph.

Dulce was her solitary attendant, while Denis was groomsman to the Vicar, and it was after the happy pair had started for their honeymoon that these two also settled the question of their lives.

"I shall miss her dreadfully," said Dulce, through a mist of tears; "but I am quite sure she will be happy."

"Delamere looked happy enough," said Denis, sadly. "Dulce, don't you think you are very hard-hearted?"

"I!"

"You. You know quite well it only rests with you to make me as happy as our friend the Vicar. Dulce, I have loved you ever since we met. Will you fulfil your father's wish, and give yourself to me?"

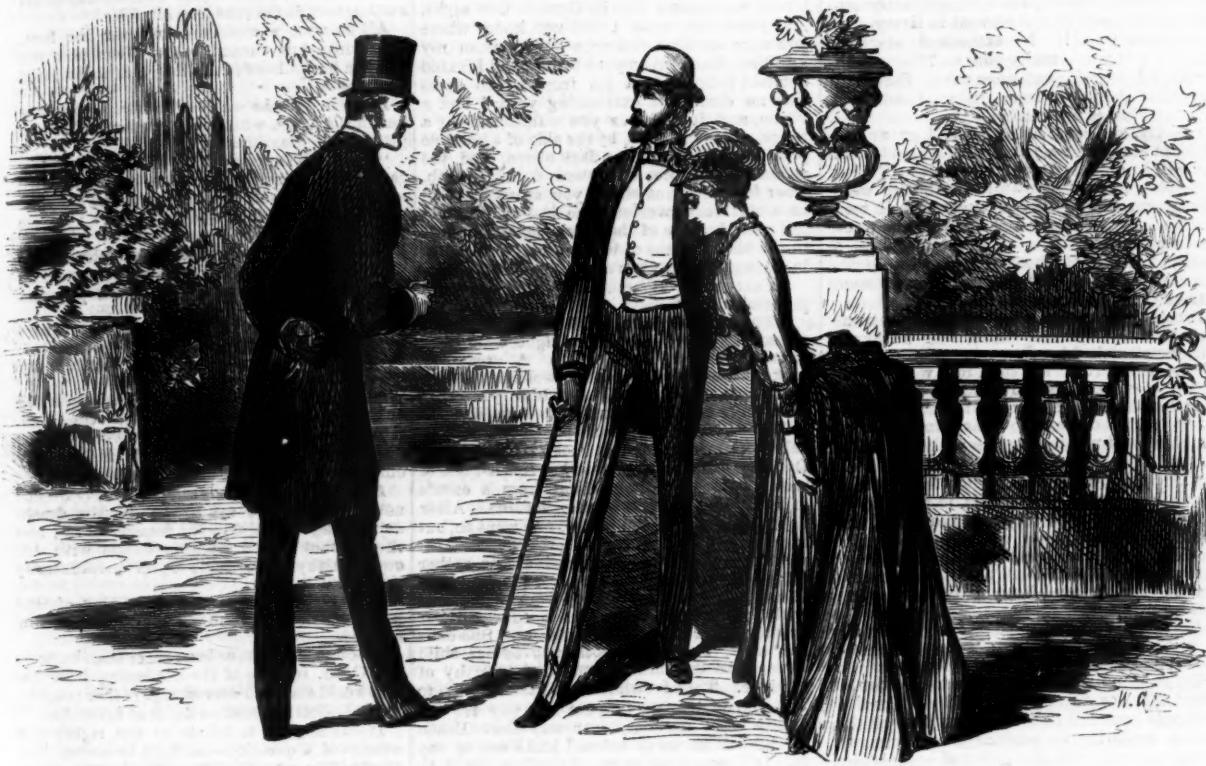
"But—"

He understood.

"Forget him, dear, as I do. To me you are John Stone's child, and no one else's daughter. Dulce, I will make you so happy if only you will let me try."

She just mentioned one word "Yes" so faintly it barely reached his ear, but it did reach it; and long afterwards, when talking to Nina Delamere of the strange case of Mr. Stone's will and the numerous advertisements for himself, Denis Adair, then Lord Raymond, told the clergyman's blithe little wife that it was only on her own wedding-day that he really heard what he thought "something to his advantage."

[THE END.]



["ARE YOU GOING TO REMAIN AT THE GRANGE, MR. SINCLAIR, MAY I ASK?" WINTER CRIED, SHARPLY.]

NOVELLETTE.]

CYRIL'S PROMISE.

—:—

CHAPTER I.

The little station at Endersleigh Green looked inexplicably dreary in the gloom and fog of the late October evening. A few oil lamps struggled feebly through the mire, and just succeeded in showing how dense it was, without, however, illuminating it to any great extent; and the single porter who wandered disconsolately down the slippery platform, on the look-out for tips that never came, made a forlorn enough figure against the dim background.

The down train had just come in, and after depositing its mail bag and one solitary passenger, had steamed noisily away again, cleaving its way through the darkness like a great red-eyed monster. The passenger—a man in an Inverness cloak—remained at the other end of the platform just where he alighted, and the porter looked at him suspiciously as he went up to him and demanded his ticket.

The traveller started, and gave himself a sort of shake, as though to arouse himself from the reverie into which he appeared to have fallen; then extending his ticket as he spoke, he said, in a low voice,

"Do you happen to know, porter, how Mrs. Sinclair is?"

He did not conclude the sentence, but broke off abruptly, and even winced as if he feared what the answer might be.

The porter looked at him curiously—making mental notes of the tall, broad, commanding-looking figure, and the bushy brown beard, which was all a slouched felt hat permitted him to see of the stranger's face.

"Mrs. Sinclair, of the Grange, was you meaning sir? She be very bad—mortal bad."

He shook his head solemnly in order to emphasise his words. "If she lives till morning it's just as much as she will do."

"Then she is still alive?"

There was a ring of hope in the young man's tones, a new-born alertness in which his whole manner partook. Evidently he had feared worse news.

"Yes—at least she were half-an-hour ago, when the groom came over here to send off a telegram. Was you thinking of going to Endersleigh Grange, sir?"

"Yes; that is where I am going. Good-night to you."

He turned away, and began walking with rapid strides towards the little wicket gate that gave access to the road, and the porter had to run in order to overtake him, and make the communication he wished.

"Wait a minute, sir! It is a long way and a lone one to Endersleigh Grange; besides, the night is too dark for you to see your hand before you. Maybe you would like a guide?"

"Nonsense, man!" exclaimed the other impatiently. Then he added, with a harsh laugh, "Why I know every step of the road from here to the Grange, and could find my way blindfold if there were any occasion for it. However, I thank you for your offer—here's something to buy a glass of ale with."

He tossed a coin to the porter, who fingered it in a professional manner, and then took it to the glimmer of one of the lamps, in order to examine it better, and confirm the pleasant anticipation that its smooth surface had given him.

"Why it is 'arf a crown!" he muttered, gazing at it and scratching his head at the same time. "The gent can be none other than Mr. Cyril Sinclair—come home again after all these years. I suppose his mother, being on her dying bed, has forgivin' him. Well, he was always a generous sort of chap, and knew how to throw his money about, for all his wildness. P'raps he's a reformed

character now; he's had plenty of time for reformation since we saw him last."

Meanwhile the subject of these meditations was making his way with rapid strides through the gloom of the night, along the muddy country road.

His boast of knowing it was no idle one, for if it had been untrue he would assuredly not have been able to proceed with that firm, unwavering step; and it is more than likely that he would have made acquaintance with one of the two ditches that bordered the highway, and were pitfalls into which, on such a night as this, the unwary traveller might readily stray.

Swiftly as he walked, and careful as he had to be, it did not prevent him from thinking at the same time; and apparently his thoughts were not of an altogether pleasant description, for two or three times a deep sigh, that was almost a groan, broke from him, and once he stopped short, and raised his eyes to the misty sky.

"Oh! if I could but live these ten years over again—oh if I could but redeem the past!" he cried, aloud, with an indescribable mixture of remorse, anguish, and despair in his tone, that thrilled out with weird effect on the darkness.

After this he walked on until he came to a pair of large iron gates, upon which the light of the lamp above shone down. Passing through these gates he found himself in a carriage drive, bordered on either side with a thick growth of shrubs, and at the end of the drive there flashed out a faint blurred radiance that indicated where the house stood.

Seen in this universal dimness, the Grange showed merely as a somewhat bulky, gable-ended building, with twisted stacks of chimneys, and a huge oaken door, studded with iron nails—strong enough to resist the onslaught of any number of burglars.

Cyril Sinclair—for the porter had been right in his surmise as to the young man's

identity—pulled very gently at the hanging bell, and his summons was immediately answered by a grey-haired servant in livery.

"Master Cyril!" he exclaimed, starting back, "is it you—really you, sir?"

"It is I, myself, and none other, Stevens," responded the young man, shaking hands with him. "How is my mother?"

"Sadly, sir, very sadly. I will go up and let Miss Meta know you are here, and then she will be able to prepare my mistress."

Sinclair nodded, and while the butler went to perform his mission the young arrival took off his Inverness cloak and felt hat, and stood in the soft-warm light of the hall lamp—a finely-built man of about thirty, with hand-some features and dark eyes, whose expression was one of haunting sadness.

A minute later, and a light, lithe form came swiftly down the oak stairs, and advanced with outstretched hand.

"Cousin Cyril!" she said, in a wonderfully sweet voice, carefully lowered as if she had been speaking in a sick chamber. "I am very glad you have come. My dear cousin has been watching and waiting for you with—oh! such anxiety!"

"Does she know I am here?" queried Sinclair, only dimly conscious, in his anxiety, of the gentle, and fairylike beauty of the young girl before him.

"Yes, she heard the clang of the gate, at the end of the drive, and some instinct told her it was you. Will you follow me upstairs?"

He obeyed; and she led the way into the sick chamber, where a shaded lamp was burning on a table close by the bedside.

Propped up with pillows was a woman of about fifty, or thereabouts, with a face that had once been full of firmness and resolution almost bordering on austerity, but was now white and wan with the pallor of approaching death.

Her eyes lighted up as she saw her son; and Meta, after having seen the young man safely in the room, gently closed the door, leaving mother and son alone together.

It was the first time they had met for nine years, and who shall say what were the emotions that agitated their hearts during those first few minutes?

Cyril remained kneeling, his head buried in the bedclothes, Mrs. Sinclair's eyes filled with tears, and she feebly stroked forth her hand, and laid it on his chestnut curls.

"Mother!" he said, at last, "since I had your message I have travelled night and day in order to come to you, and beg your forgiveness for all the sorrow I have brought upon you. Tell me that my hope has not been in vain!"

"My son," she replied, slowly, and with some difficulty, "the years have brought me wisdom; they have tamed my spirit, and taught me a forbearance that I used not to know; they have taught me my error in dealing with you. If you have been to blame so have I, and we have need of mutual forgiveness. I thank Heaven time has been given me to speak to you once more, for there are many things I wish to say to you, and I fear I have little time to say them. Are you," her voice faltered, "still on the stage?"

"No," he answered, in a very low voice.

She breathed a sigh of relief.

"How have you been getting your living?"

"By journalism," he replied; "you know I always had a sort of taste for literature."

"Yes—yes, I know!" She paused a moment as if to collect her thoughts, and he stretched out his hand and enclosed hers in it. Then she went on, "For over six years Meta Rushton has been living with me. She is, as you may be aware, the orphan daughter of a second cousin of mine, and is therefore a relation, although a very distant one."

"Yes!" he said, rather surprised at this beginning; "but why need we talk of Miss Rushton, mother? She is a stranger to me all but in name."

"I know that, and it is for that reason I

wish to impress upon you how sweet, how tender and gentle she is, Cyril! One night, four years ago, when I did not know where you were, or what you were doing, when my mind was troubled on your behalf, and I feared you had fallen into a pit from which there was no chance of extricating you, I had a vision, and in it I saw you walking along a rough and stony road, by the side of a horrible precipice. The sky was dark above, and the gloom of the abyss showed dark beneath. Your feet were unsteady; you stumbled, and an awful fear overcame me lest you should fall over the edge of the precipice, and be lost in the black depths of the chasm. I cried out in my agony, and then a voice said to me—

"Fear not. Behold thy guardian angel protects him!"

Then I looked up, and I saw by your side a heavenly form, haloed with light, whose face I recognized as that of Meta. A great joy took possession of me, and I woke up, saying exultantly, "Meta will save him yet—it is given to her to redeem my son's happiness!"

The sick woman had spoken with such vehemence that she sank back exhausted, and Cyril sprang up and held to her lips a glass of water, which he poured out from a carafe standing on the table at the bedside. After drinking it she seemed better, and went on, but more quietly.

"Ever since then, an instinct—or rather let me call it a divine voice—has told me that Meta was fated to become your wife, and with that end in view I have educated her and loved her as my own daughter. She calls me 'aunt,' but never mother; and she is worthy of my love. This is what I wanted to say to you, Cyril, so as to prepare the way for the future, and my only fear was that Death might call me away before I had time to say it. It is very near now. I shall not be with you much longer, my son; but before I go hence, and am seen no more, I ask you to promise me that within six months of my death you will marry Meta."

The young man had listened in silence to this somewhat startling speech but as his mother pronounced the last words he started violently, and seemed deeply agitated.

"It is impossible!—utterly impossible!" he muttered, not as an answer to her, but as an involuntary revelation of his own thoughts.

Nevertheless, low as he had spoken the words, the sick woman heard them, and seized upon them eagerly.

"And why impossible? She is young, lovely, and amiable. What more could you wish for?"

"Nothing, nothing; only—" he broke off abruptly, and lowered his eyes, so as not to meet his mother's piercing glance. "How can I expect the young lady to have me, even if I propose to her?" he asked, with a nervous laugh.

"If that is the root of your objection you need urge it no longer!" Mrs. Sinclair replied, calmly. "I have already told Meta of my vision, and to what it pointed, and she is quite ready to marry you as soon as you ask her."

"But, mother, you surely have not exacted from her this promise?" exclaimed Cyril, with startled agitation.

"Yes, I have indeed, but it was a promise spontaneously given. She is, on her part, as anxious as I am on mine to secure your happiness, and she told me that if both you and I wished it she would become your wife."

The young man paced the room in uncontrollable excitement, while his mother watched him from the bed.

It seemed easy enough to see how Mrs. Sinclair's strong will had prevailed over the more flexible one of the young girl committed to her charge, until the latter had adopted her protectress's views, and been ready to submit to any sacrifice demanded of her.

Cyril looked towards his mother.

Her eyes, unnaturally bright, were fixed intently on him; the rest of her features were deadly white, and her thin hands plucked

nervously at the bedclothes with an incessant restlessness that made him shudder.

All at once a change came over her face. The white hue turned to grey, and she fell back on her pillows with a low, half articulated moan.

In an instant he was beside her, supporting her in his arms, while her eyes sought his in piteous supplication.

"Cyril—it is coming fast!" she said, in low gasps. "The end is very near—but let me take with me into Eternity the assurance of your happiness, both here and hereafter. Promise me—promise me!"

The young man's face was almost as blanchéd as his own. It was only by an effort that he restrained a groan from escaping his lips.

"Do not ask me, mother—leave my future in the hands of Providence!" he entreated, very earnestly; but her thin fingers only grasped his arm the tighter.

"Not now! Providence has already pointed out the path; it is for you to obey. Oh, Cyril, if you but knew how much I have thought, and wept, and prayed over you! My son, my only son, do not deny my dying request!"

And that it was a dying request, it needed not an expiring eye to see, for the death-deweeping dimly to the marble brow; and the contact of the clammy hands with his own healthy flesh made Cyril involuntarily shudder.

How could he resist the pleading of that pitiful voice—the entreaty of those closing eyes?

To do so would have been more than human; and Cyril, in spite of the hardening influence of a world that had served him rather roughly, was still soft-hearted as a girl of seventeen.

It was no time to debate on the rights and wrongs of a question—no time to argue—and surely if he gave the promise, Heaven would absolve him from its fulfilment!

"I promise, mother!" he said, hoarsely, and the change wrought by those three words was magical.

The strained look died out of the sick woman's face, her lips moved—smiled even—and she sank back in his arms with a low prayer of thankfulness.

"Now I can die in peace," she said; and Meta Rushton, coming softly in ten minutes later, found the young man still on his knees by the bedside, while, with an expression of ineffable peace on her quiet face, his mother lay back against her pillows—dead!

CHAPTER II.

IN the few days that followed Cyril had enough to do in attending to the duties that naturally devolved upon him; and, on the reading of his mother's will, he found himself her sole heir, and the possessor of five thousand a year, as well as Endersleigh Grange and its extensive grounds.

His surprise was very great, for he had fully expected that Meta Rushton would have been well provided for, and on the morning after the funeral he said something of this kind to her.

Meta was presiding at the breakfast-table, on which the autumn sunshine glittered, showing up the delicate purity of the linen, and sparkling on polished silver and dainty china.

The young girl herself looked wonderfully fair and delicate in the early morning light, the black dress she wore rendering yet more lovely the perfect transparency of her complexion.

She was rather pale this morning, and the blue veins made a visible network on her temples, over which soft little locks of golden hair lovingly strayed.

Her manner was, as it had been all along, quiet and subdued, but she treated Cyril with a friendly unreserve that was quite free from embarrassment, and strangers might have

judged from her demeanour that he was indeed, the "cousin," she called him.

When he made his allusion to the will she flushed a little.

"It was at my own wish that Aunt Gertrude left me nothing," she said. "I entreated her not to do so, because I had no claim upon her whatever—"

"Surely your goodness to her since you first came to the Grange constituted a claim!" interrupted Cyril warmly, but Meta only shook her head.

"No; what I did was done out of pure affection, and in gratitude for her kindness. She owed me nothing for it. Besides, I have fifty pounds a year of my own, and that is quite enough to keep me in comfort!"

Cyril smiled at her innocent simplicity, but he said no more, for he saw that mercenary considerations found no response in her, and an involuntary feeling of admiration took possession of him towards this gentle pure-minded maiden, in whom his mother recognised his guardian angel.

"Will you stroll round the garden with me?" he asked, after breakfast was over; and she at once assented.

It was a fine, exhilarating October morning, with a blue sky, and a mellow softness in the air. The trees, in their golden russet hues, and the Virginia creeper that wreathed the porch with flaming crimson, redeemed the garden from looking dull, even though all the flowers had been beaten down by last week's rains—all, that is to say, except a few clumps of mignonette, which were sending out faint wafts of perfume—summer's last breath of sweetness!

Cyril felt in a new world, as he wandered about those well-known grounds, with Meta at his side.

The peculiar position in which he stood towards her naturally gave him an interest in her, and it was enhanced by her youth and beauty.

She was so different to the woman whom, of late years, he had associated with—so different that it was hard to believe she was made of the same flesh and blood.

"I could almost believe myself a boy again, as I see myself surrounded by these scenes of my boyhood," he said, and she looked up with her quick, sympathetic smile.

"Yes; I am sure it must be a pleasure to you to see them once more."

"I don't know," he responded, with half a sigh; "the pleasure is dashed with pain, for it is full of regrets for a wasted life."

"At thirty years of age you cannot say your life is wasted," she returned, softly, "for there is yet time left for you to redeem the errors of the past."

He looked at her keenly, uncertain how much or how little his mother had told her, but her eyes were fixed on the gravel, and he only saw the dainty curve of flushed cheek, and the long shadow of her sweeping lashes, from which he was unable to gather any information.

"You know that my mother and I quarrelled when I was twenty-one years of age?" he said, interrogatively, and she merely made a little motion of assent.

"She was most anxious for me to enter the Church," he went on, "and I not only refused to do this, but insisted on going on the stage. With my mother's religious bigotry you may imagine how this step grieved her. She insisted on my giving up the life of an actor, and I—hot-headed and hot-tempered—absolutely refused to obey her. Then she cast me off, and told me she would have nothing more to do with me—"

"She was sorry for it afterwards!" interrupted Meta, eagerly. "She has often told me she acted harshly towards you; and she bitterly regretted it. Years ago she made efforts to find you, but they were futile, and it was a mere chance that, even at the last, her advertisement in the *Times* brought you back to her."

"Yes," he said, "it was indeed a mere

chance—but, thank Heaven, I did see it! I am not surprised she could not find me, for when she told me, years ago, that I was a disgrace to my name I changed it, and now none of my acquaintances know me as 'Cyril Sinclair.'

It was just at this moment that their *tête-à-tête* was interrupted by the appearance of a tall, dark, slight young man, with black hair and moustache, and eager, restless black eyes. He was the doctor who had attended Mrs. Sinclair in her last illness, and as he came towards them Cyril noticed that Meta shrank back a little—as a sensitive plant does from the touch of rude hands.

After greeting, Sinclair and the young girl Dr. Wynter said to the latter,—

"I am charged with a commission from my sister, Miss Rushton. She asked me to give her love, and ask you to come on a visit to her for a few weeks. I need not say how delighted both she and I will be to see you."

Meta coloured painfully, and seemed embarrassed.

Both of the young men were watching her rather intently.

"It is very kind of your sister," she faltered at length, "but I fear I cannot accept her invitation. I have so much to do—"

"But a change would do you good," interrupted Dr. Wynter, his brows knitting themselves together into a frown. "You have exerted yourself a good deal in nursing Mrs. Sinclair, remember, and you really require a rest!"

Meta did not seem to know how to reply, and Cyril came to her aid.

"I think—if you will allow me to say so—that Miss Rushton would have more chance of a rest if she stayed quietly at home!" he said, and Meta cast a grateful glace at him for thus helping her out of her dilemma.

Wynter seemed annoyed at Sinclair's interference. He turned upon him sharply.

"Are you going to remain at the Grange, Mr. Sinclair, may I ask?"

It was now Cyril's turn to appear embarrassed, but he was only silent for a moment, and then said, quietly,—

"I am not quite sure. I have not yet completed my arrangements, but whether I remain or not it will not make any difference to Miss Rushton!"

"Pardon me, but I cannot agree with you. Miss Rushton can hardly continue to live at the Grange if you are here too."

This was a phase of the matter that had not struck Cyril, but he was equal to the emergency.

"Certainly not," he responded. "I am going to write to my aunt—my mother's sister—and ask her to come and take the housekeeping, so as to permit Miss Rushton to have an entire rest."

Dr. Wynter bowed with sullen acquiescence, but it was clear he was deeply annoyed at the refusal, and, inconsequently enough, blamed Cyril as being the cause of it. After a few more observations he took leave, and when he was gone Cyril said,—

"I hope, Cousin Meta"—he had adopted the title she had given him, although in reality they were not cousins, but very distant connections—"I hope I shall not be offending your prejudices if I say I don't like Doctor Wynter?"

"I am afraid," Meta returned, with a slightly arch smile, "my prejudices run in exactly the opposite direction. I think Dr. Wynter is very clever as a physician, but—"

"Not pleasant as a man!" added Sinclair, as she paused, unwilling to complete her sentence.

"That was what I was going to say, only I thought it would be ill-natured. He was very good to my aunt during her illness, and very kind to me. I ought not to say anything against him, I am sure."

That same day Cyril wrote to his aunt, who promptly responded to the letter by putting in an appearance.

She was rather older than Mrs. Sinclair,

and very prim and precise, added to which she was extremely deaf, and carried about with her an extraordinary instrument resembling a horn, through which you had to speak if you wished to address her.

During the time that followed, Cyril and Meta were naturally thrown a great deal into each other's society, and, at the end of a month, Sinclair was still in the same wavering state of mind as he had been the day after his mother's death.

Prudence warned him that he was wrong to stay, since, by doing so, he was not only exposing himself to temptation, but also leading Meta to suppose that he was willing to carry out the wishes of his mother—of which he knew her to be aware.

And yet he could not tear himself away. The days passed by so swiftly, bringing with them a deeper knowledge of the sweetness of Meta's character—a deeper delight in the charms of her society.

It was so long since he had been given the companionship of a pure, high-minded and refined girl, that it came upon him both as a surprise and delight, and, for the first time in his chequered career, he was tasting the enchantment of love—love in its purest, divinest essence.

Greatly to his annoyance, Dr. Wynter was a frequent visitor at the Grange, and it was quite clear that the object of his visits was Meta.

The young girl herself seemed to be the only person who was unaware of it, but she was so entirely free from vanity or coquetry that it never struck her that the doctor was in love with her.

One morning, Cyril was standing at the hall door smoking a meditative cigar and gazing out into the garden, when, turning round at the faint rustling of garments, he saw Meta coming downstairs, dressed ready to go out.

"I am going to call on Miss Wynter," she said, as she fastened the eighth button of her Swedish kid glove. "You know she is an invalid, who can't get out, and is therefore grateful to anyone who will have a little gossip with her."

"May I accompany you?" asked Cyril, throwing away his cigar; and Meta, with a slightly increased colour on her dainty cheeks, gave a ready assent.

CHAPTER III.

It would be hard to say which of the pair most enjoyed the walk from the Grange to Dr. Wynter's house.

It was a frosty morning, with the keen breath of late autumn lending a crispness to the air, and a clearness to the distant hills, which bounded the horizon.

On their arrival at their destination, they found the doctor sitting beside his sister's couch, engaged in showing her some photographs, which he placed on the table as he rose to greet his visitors.

"Reginald has a perfect mania for collecting photographs," observed Miss Wynter, when they were all seated. "But he is going to give me some of them for crotaleum purposes. I want a very pretty face to make into a picture, and I had just selected one as you came in."

"Which one?" asked Meta, who knew that the invalid girl was gratified by an interest being taken in her artistic employment.

"This," answered Dr. Wynter, holding out a cabinet-sized photograph as he spoke. "What do you think of Arabella's taste?"

The likeness was that of a beautiful woman of five or six-and-twenty, a woman with a dark, imperious face, and large, lustrous eyes. A beautiful face, certainly, but one that left an unpleasant impression, for all its loveliness.

Meta was sitting facing the light, and Cyril stood behind her. The two Wynters were

opposite, and it chanced that as Sinclair bent forward to glance at the photograph over Meta's shoulder, both brother and sister were looking at him, and were cognisant of the strange change that passed over his face. All the colour left his cheeks, and the expression in his eyes seemed curiously like fear.

He said nothing, however, did not even attempt to examine the photograph, but took a chair that was placed in the shadow of the curtains, and began playing absently with the silky ears of a collie dog that had come to lay his head on the visitor's knee.

"I don't like the face!" Meta said, with a little shudder, as she put the photograph down. "All the same, I suppose it would be considered very handsome."

"Rather more of a man's beauty than a lady's," returned the doctor. "What is your opinion, Mr. Sinclair?"

"I agree with Miss Rushton."

"I do not suppose the photograph flatters the original," went on Wynter, still addressing himself to Cyril, whom he was watching intently. "It is the kind of face that would be far more beautiful in the flesh than in a picture. Don't you think so?"

"No," replied Cyril, shortly.

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor. "Doubtless you know this lady?"

There was quite a moment's pause before Cyril spoke.

Truthful by nature, a war was going on within his breast as to whether he should confess or deny the impeachment. Veracity finally triumphed.

"Yes," he said, quietly. "I have seen her."

"She is an actress, I presume?"

"She is—or was."

"And her name?"

"That I am not in a position to give you!" Sinclair said, coldly and distinctly. Then he rose. "I have to go to the post-office," he observed to Meta. "I will call for you as I come back."

But Arabella Wynter entreated the young girl very earnestly to stay to luncheon, alleging, as an excuse, her own loneliness, and the fact that her brother would be absent during the afternoon on his professional rounds.

Meta was too kind-hearted to withstand these entreaties, so Cyril went away, on the understanding that she would return home before evening.

When the time came for her to take her departure, Arabella pressed her to remain a little longer, until Reginald came back, and could escort her home; but as this was exactly what Meta wished to avoid, she made some excuse, and hurried away as quickly as she could.

But Fate was against her, for hardly had she proceeded a quarter of a mile when she met the doctor, who insisted on getting out of his gig and walking back with her.

It was impossible to refuse his offered escort without absolute rudeness, and rudeness was altogether foreign to the nature of our gentle heroine, who determined to make the best of the situation.

The short November afternoon was closing in. From the hollows faint wreaths of mist were rising, and the distant hills were already obscured in the shadows of evening.

The air was raw, chill, and penetrating, not at all the sort of weather one would choose to be out in.

"Shall we take the short cut through the spinney?" asked the doctor, offering his arm, which, after a momentary hesitation, she took. "It is much nearer than keeping to the high-road."

She acquiesced willingly, but when they were in the little plantation called "York's Spinney," she was rather sorry they had not kept to the more frequented high road, for it was very lonely here in the shadow of the trees, and far darker than it had been outside.

She tried to walk faster, but her companion

evidently enjoyed the *tête-à-tête*, and was determined to prolong it as much as possible.

At last Meta said,—

"Had we not better hurry on? It is growing quite dusk."

"And what of that? Surely you are not afraid?"

"Not afraid, exactly; but—"

"But what?"

"I am anxious to get back home."

"You are cruel to me!" exclaimed Wynter, reproachfully. "It is seldom enough, since Cyril Sinclair's return, that I have an opportunity of speaking to you alone, and when Fate is kind enough to give me one, you are all anxiety to snatch it out of my hands!"

Meta was silent. There was something, both in the words and manner, that she did not like, and she was more desirous than ever of reaching the Grange.

"The time has come when I must speak," went on Wynter, vehemently, coming to a standstill, but retaining his grasp of her arm in spite of her efforts to free it. "I can remain silent no longer. Surely you must have seen how I love you, and that it is the great wish of my life to call you my wife. Meta, Meta! tell me that my hope is not a vain one!"

There was real passion, real pathos, in his voice, and though it called forth no echo from the young girl, it nevertheless touched her.

"Oh! I am so sorry, so very sorry!" she exclaimed, distressfully. "I am afraid I ought to have foreseen this, and prevented it!"

"Don't say that, Meta, or you will drive me to despair. Tell me you will marry me, and I swear no lover that ever lived shall be so true, so devoted to you, as I will be!"

"It is impossible, Mr. Wynter, it cannot be!"

"Why impossible, Meta?"

"Because I do not love you."

"But I will teach you to love me! Only trust yourself to me, and I feel sure I can secure your happiness!"

She shook her head. This scene was inexpressibly painful to her, inasmuch as she could not help inflicting pain on him.

For a long time Wynter would not take "no" for an answer, but when he found that she fully meant what she said, his mood changed, and he became too infuriated to remember what was due to his own manhood, if not to her helplessness.

"You are in love with Cyril Sinclair!" he cried, while his dark eyes flashed with wrathful passion. "If he had not come to darken your path you would have been willing enough to accept me as your husband, instead of an adventurer—a spendthrift whose past life will not bear looking into!"

"Hush!" she exclaimed, drawing herself up with a movement full of dignity. "Mr. Sinclair's name may be left out of the question. You have no right to speak of him thus!"

"I have a right, and, more than that, I will prove the truth of my words. He is all that I have called him, and if you could see the secrets of his past, you would turn away shuddering. It is he who is my rival! he who has stolen your love from me. But, by Heaven! I will not sit tamely by while you throw me aside for him—or at least—he laughed harshly—"I will have one kiss from those sweet lips before he has profaned them."

He had lost all control over himself in his passionate anger, and seizing Meta in his arms he kissed her over and over again—her month, her throat, her brow.

"Help, help!" screamed the terrified girl—not however, with any hope that assistance would come, for the spinney had acquired a bad reputation amongst the villagers as being haunted, and not even the labourers would return home from their work through it.

Assistance, however, was nearer than she

fancied, for the next moment a man sprang forward from amongst the trees—a powerful blow sent Wynter reeling down on the fallen leaves, and Meta found herself clasped close to the bosom of Cyril Sinclair.

"Come away," he said, after a moment's pause, and drawing her arm through his. "This is no place for you, and I will settle with that gentleman at some future date."

Meta was only too glad to obey, and they proceeded some distance in silence. Then Cyril became aware that the young girl was trembling violently from the effect of the excitement she had just gone through, and he led her to the fallen trunk of a tree which lay across the path.

"Sit down," he said tenderly, "your nerves are overwrought and unstrung. You will be better presently."

For answer she burst into a flood of tears, and Cyril, with every loving epithet he knew, tried to soothe her. His own heart was beating riotously, for the murderous impulse that had sprung up within him when he saw Wynter's arms round the girl had told him the depth and intensity of his own love for her, and now her head rested against his arm, and he could see, by the pulsating of the little brooch at her throat, how violently agitated she was.

Was it wonderful that he, too, should forget all the resolves he had made—all the barriers that divided him from her? Was it wonderful that, just for one moment, he felt himself free to tell her he loved her, and when she nestled closely in his arms, that he should kiss the upturned mouth, while murmuring caressing names that thrilled her through and through with delicious rapture?

Blame him, if you will, but recollect that, after all, he was only human, and the temptation was a very sore one. It is hard to put happiness away from us when it floats before our eyes, and it is only necessary to stretch forth our hands in order to grasp it!

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Meta woke the next morning it was with a vague sense of happiness, that deepened as she remembered the event of the preceding day, and she sprang out of bed and dressed, saying to herself with a child's joyous delight,—

"He loves me!—he loves me!"

Even Nature herself seemed to share in her new found bliss, for the pale November sunshine was slanting into the room, and a robin, perched on the leafless branch of a beech-tree near the window, poured out a plaintive little song, that fell on Meta's ears with additional sweetness.

Even before she had ever seen Cyril her interest had been awakened in him by his mother's description, and her enthusiastic nature had made her promise to marry him if he saw fit to ask her, in order that she might devote her whole life and energies to the task of leading him back to that purer life which his mother thought he had forsaken.

Thus the young girl had glided insensibly from interest in the unknown, to love for the known, and it seemed to her that no woman could wish for greater happiness than to become the wife of Cyril Sinclair.

On going downstairs to the morning-room she found Miss Trinder already there, her horn beside her, but no one else was in the apartment.

"Do you know where Cyril has gone off to?" shouted the old lady, who, owing to her deafness, either spoke in an inaudible whisper or bawled out at the top of her voice. "Stevens says he left by the seven o'clock train; but it seems a curious thing that he should leavent in this way, without letting anyone know beforehand."

Meta's heart grew cold, but she said no-

thing, and a minute later Stevens came in, with a note on a silver salver.

"Mr. Cyril left it for you, miss," said the butler.

Whereupon Miss Trinder, who, like most deaf people, was most anxious not to lose a syllable of what passed, demanded to know, in a loud voice, what Stevens had said, and applied her trumpet to her ear for the answer.

While the butler was sending his voice down this alarming-looking instrument, Meta withdrew to the window and opened the note, which was short enough to be read in very little time:

"MY DARLING—for so let me call you for the last time! I have gone away because I dare not, in honour, stay near you any longer. I told you last night I loved you—and Heaven knows I spoke the truth! But all the same, I had no business to have uttered those words, for between you and me lies a gulf, which I fear can never be spanned! Dearest, forgive me! I have no excuse to offer for my conduct, and it will be better not to give an explanation. I can only tell you that Fate has been cruel to me—cruel to us both, indeed, for I believe, in my heart, that I could have made you happy—that I should have striven to do so I know.

"I shall not come to the Grange again for some time, perhaps, never, unless you should be annoyed by that man Wynter, in which case you have only to send a telegram to my solicitor, whose address I enclose, and he will let me know that you have need of me. Then I shall come, for it is my duty, as well as my desire, to protect you. In the meantime, I beg you to remain at the Grange, and to look upon it as your home. Alas! I cannot even bid you hope for better times. I have sown the wind and I must e'en reap the whirlwind! But at least I can subscribe myself,—Your friend,

CYRIL SINCLAIR."

Mr. Reginald Wynter did not enjoy the sensations of being knocked down any more than the generality of men do. Moreover, an extra bitterness was added to the indignity by the fact of his assailant being his hated rival.

After the departure of Cyril and Meta, the doctor slowly rose to his feet, and, full of a vindictive desire for vengeance, followed them at some distance.

Thus it happened that he was witness of the embrace that passed between them, and was driven almost frantic with jealousy and rage, at this confirmation of his previous suspicions.

He turned back, and walked with hasty footsteps homewards, revolving in his mind vague plans of vengeance, which gradually took shape.

On his arrival at his own house, he found his sister engaged in putting away the photographs he had brought down for her to select from; and the one she had chosen she had put on one side.

He took it up as he entered, and examined it closely.

"Yes," he muttered, "I fancy I should know the original if I were to see her."

"Are you in love with her then?" asked Arabella, quizzically, as she watched him.

"No; but I am as anxious to see her as if I were. Did you notice how Sinclair started when his eyes first fell on the face?"

Arabella nodded. She had both noticed and speculated on the circumstance.

"I do not see what you can gather from that, though," she added, and her brother did not take the trouble to enter into details, for it was with him an article of faith that a woman couldn't keep a secret.

His plan was to go to Paris, where the likeness had been taken, find out the name of the original, then seek her out, and learn from her what connection linked her with Sinclair.

That there were difficulties in the way of perfect success he knew quite well, but he did not despair, for he had overcome much greater difficulties than these, and, moreover, he had implicit faith in his own abilities—always an important factor in such undertakings.

He was a man, too, who believed in striking while the iron was hot, so the following day he made arrangements with a fellow surgeon to take his professional work, and the next morning was ready to start for the Continent.

It was only when he got to the station, and had taken his ticket, that he learned from the porter—who was only too glad to get some one to gossip with—that Cyril had left Endersleigh Green the morning before. His surprise at this intelligence was extreme, and he wondered whether Sinclair's hurried departure had anything to do with the object of his own journey.

"Perhaps Mr. Sinclair only went up to London for the day?" he suggested to the porter; but that functionary shook his head.

"Ah! no, sir. He said he was going to leave England, and it might be some time before he was back again."

This unexpected incident furnished the doctor with a subject for meditation during his own journey; but it was a mystery to which he could not even guess a key. Being anxious to lose no time, he went straight from London to Dover, and crossed from thence to Calais, where he arrived in the early dawn of a raw November morning. After that he pushed on to Paris, and as it was too late to obtain an interview with the photographer that day, he waited until the next morning. Success crowned his efforts. No sooner had he shown the likeness than it was recognised.

"Oh, yes!" said the photographer. "Two years ago you would have seen that likeness in every shop-window in Paris. It is Madame Tosca, the comic actress. She is not quite so popular now as she was then—people say she has gone off, and it is hinted"—the speaker shrugged his shoulders, and smiled amiably—"that madame is fonder of *eau-de-vie* than is altogether good for her."

"Could monsieur give me her address?" asked Wynter, politely; but in this respect Monsieur could not oblige him, for La Tosca was an erratic sort of person, and rarely stayed long in the same place. However, he gave the inquirer certain directions calculated to put him in the way of discovering her whereabouts, and then Wynter took leave and hurried away to see the manager of the theatre where Madame Tosca used to act, and from whom he, with very little difficulty, obtained her address.

All this took time, and it was growing dusk as he found himself in the rue where the actress's apartments were situated. Just as he was crossing the road he became aware of a figure in front which struck him as familiar—a tall, broad-shouldered man, wearing an Inverness cloak and a soft felt hat, rather slouched over his face.

"It is like Sinclair!" muttered the doctor, slackening his footsteps. "Is it possible his destination can be the same as my own? At any rate, I can see where he goes."

Keeping some distance in the rear he dogged his unconscious enemy until the latter actually disappeared in the very house to which Wynter was bound. The heart of the latter swelled with exultation—success seemed certain now!

He hesitated for awhile, then entered a shop close at hand, and selected a hat like that Cyril had been wearing. It had struck him that if his face were concealed, he would not run much risk of being recognised even if Sinclair chanced to see him, and it was well to provide against all contingencies.

Then he boldly entered the house, passed the concierge, but turned back to ask him on what *étage* Madame Tosca's apartments were. Having received this information, he went on upstairs—not with the intention of at once seeking the actress, but with the purpose of waiting till Cyril came out, and thus making

quite certain that the man he had tracked was indeed Sinclair—for it must be remembered that, as yet, he had only seen his back, and although one may be *morally* certain of the identity of a back, moral certainty is not legal proof!

Madame Tosca's name was engraved on a small brass plate on the outer door, and—oh! good luck!—the outer door was not latched! Wynter gently pushed it open, and found himself confronted by a heavy plush curtain, which hung over the doorway. Beyond this he saw a small anteroom, which gave access to the boudoir or sitting-room, and just opposite was another heavy plush *portière*, which no doubt curtained the door of communication.

Wynter hesitated a moment. Playing the eavesdropper is not exactly a gentlemanly occupation, and of choice he would not have selected the part; but scruples must be put on one side when one embarks in such enterprises as this, and he finally crossed the room very softly, and pulling aside the curtain applied his eye to the keyhole—having first made sure that he would be able to hide himself behind the window draperies in case of surprise.

What he saw was this. A luxuriously furnished room, with much ormolu and gilding, and pale blue upholstery. Flowers were all over the room, and the air must have been sickly with their fragrance. Standing upright by the mantelpiece was the man Wynter had followed, and whose face he was now able to recognise as that of Cyril Sinclair. Opposite him, lolling back in an easy chair, and dressed in a gorgeous tea-gown of gold-coloured plush, trimmed with lace and ribbons, sat a woman—the original of the photograph.

Having thus made sure of their several identities, Wynter removed his eye from the keyhole, and applied it to his ear. The pair were speaking French, but Wynter was as well acquainted with that language as with his own, and had no difficulty in following what they said, especially as Cyril's voice, though low, was very distinct, and the lady spoke loudly, and somewhat coarsely.

CHAPTER V.

"I TELL you," Madame Tosca said, negligently, but with a certain doggedness, "I wish to see England, and play the part of a country lady. It would be amusing, *ma foi*!"

She laughed, as if she enjoyed the amusement in anticipation.

"I should like to see this country house of yours—this Grange, which sounds so romantic. For a change the life would be delightful, especially as I could throw it up directly I was tired of it."

There was a moment's pause. When Cyril spoke, his voice was very decided.

"And I tell you that it is impossible. I am willing to allow you half my income—nay, two-thirds if you will not be satisfied with half—but only on condition that you keep away from me, and remain in France."

"And where will you be, *mon ami*, the while?" she asked, mockingly.

"I shall travel—join some expedition to Africa, perhaps. At any rate, I shall not remain in Paris!"

"You will go to England, perhaps?"

"No. I shall not go to England!"

"You are cruel to your native land," said the actress, still with the same veiled mockery. "Perhaps you have infringed your country's laws; or, perhaps—" She waited a moment, and spoke the next words very slowly. "Perhaps there is a lady in the case?"

Wynter wished he could have seen Cyril's face at that moment, but the capacities of a keyhole are limited, and will not accommodate eye and ear at the same time, so he had to content himself with listening eagerly for the young man's reply.

"My reasons I have already explained, so

far as I intend to explain them. You are, of course, at liberty to surmise what you like. I told you before that I absolutely refuse to take you to the Grange, and I think you know me well enough to see that I intend keeping my word."

"Is this the way most Englishmen treat their wives?"

"Yes!" he answered, sternly, "when their wives have behaved as you have. You are well aware that but for the shame and publicity I should have obtained a divorce from you long ere this, and even yet I may do so if you drive me to extremities!"

His wife! Wynter could scarcely refrain from an exclamation of triumph.

La Tosca was silent for a few minutes; then she said, in a softer voice,—

"Can we not let the past be past, Cyril? Can we not begin over again?"

"Never!" he cried, vehemently. "The marriage bond is one that, once broken, can never be renewed. Nothing would ever induce me to live with you as your husband again!"

As he spoke he made a step towards the door, and Wynter, alarmed for his own safety, stepped back, and hid himself behind the drawn window curtains, which were full and heavy, and concealed him perfectly.

But the interview was not yet over, for it seemed as if La Tosca interposed herself between her husband and the door, so as to force him to listen to her, for her voice was loud and strident; and although, owing to the distance, Wynter was not able to follow all she said, he heard a few words, now and again, of coarse abuses, that showed him the lady had given rein to her temper, and was reviling Sinclair for his refusal to take her back.

Of what Cyril said it was impossible to distinguish a syllable, for his voice was never raised. Indeed, he seemed to be trying his best to soothe his companion, but without success. At length a series of hysterical screams indicated that the actress had taken refuge in tears, and directly after Cyril hastily left the apartment, passed through the ante-chamber, and so on downstairs.

"Now for it!" thought Wynter, and, boldly issuing from his place of concealment, he knocked at the boudoir-door, and, without waiting for an answer, went in.

The actress sprang to her feet, and confronted him haughtily, at the same time demanding his business.

"I beg you to pardon my intrusion, Madame," said the doctor, his quick eye roving round, and noting with little surprise a small revolver lying on the table. "I came to see your husband, Mr. Cyril Sinclair, and to ask him to explain conduct which it is hardly possible to justify. I was not aware until my arrival in Paris that he was married. It was a secret that he preserved very religiously during his recent visit to England."

"And may I ask what there was in his conduct, during his stay in England, that has brought you here?"

"Certainly!" returned Wynter, gravely; "and I shall answer you the more readily, because it concerns you to know it. He made love to a lovely young girl, who believed him to be free to marry her."

A dusky-red flamed into the actress's still beautiful face. Involuntarily she stretched out her hand, and grasped the revolver.

"He dared to do this!" she muttered, wrathfully. "That, then, is the reason he would not take me to England!"

"The young lady lives at the Grange; her name is Meta Rushton," preceeded Wynter, deliberately. "You see, I am perfectly open with you, because I wish you to know the truth."

For all her jealous rage, La Tosca was a woman of the world, and therefore suspicious. Fixing her eyes keenly on her visitor, she demanded,—

"And why, pray, do you take so much interest in having 'the truth,' as you call it, made known?"

"Because I was, and am, in love with the young lady myself!" answered the doctor, deciding that boldness would answer his purpose best. "She would have been willing to marry me if Cyril Sinclair had not appeared and taken her affections from me; and even yet I hope she may do so, when she knows that he has already got a wife. You see, Madame, I am frank with you."

"It is well for you that you are!" she replied, with a sneering curl of her handsome lips. "I do not believe in disinterested benevolence, perhaps because I have never experienced it! If, by telling me this, you have a purpose of your own to serve, why, then, I can accept your story as the truth."

"I have a purpose to serve," he admitted; "inasmuch as I want you to write to Miss Rushton and give her proofs of your marriage. It is only right that she should know it; and when she is assured of it, her heart will turn back to me again."

And then he went on to tell the actress just so much of the scene in the plantation as vanity would permit, with the result that she worked herself into a state of jealous rage, furious enough even to alarm him.

She was a woman of such fierce and ungovernable passions that it was not improbable her wrath might be presently turned against himself, and Reginald Wynter, being wise in his generation, deemed prudence the better part of valour.

"Madame," he said, laying his firm, though slender fingers on her arm, "permit me to relieve you of that revolver. Your hand is trembling with agitation, and it is possible you may, involuntarily, do yourself an injury with the weapon!"

She laughed mockingly.

"Do you an injury you mean. Well, perhaps you are right. My hand does tremble. I must take something to steady my nerves!"

She put the revolver down on the table and went to a small cabinet, from which she took a cut-glass spirit decanter; it contained brandy, and she drank a wine-glassfull of the fiery liquid, undiluted as it was.

"There!" she said, turning round again and giving a shake to her magnificent shoulders. "I am better now and ready for action. Give me the revolver," for he had taken it in his hand and was examining it curiously, "and I will put it away for future emergencies. As you say, it is rather a dangerous plaything!"

That night, all Paris rang with the news of the murder that had been committed in the Rue G—.

Adelaide Tosca, the beautiful burlesque actress, whom everyone had heard of, and nearly everybody had seen, had been found in her room lying prone on the floor, her silks and laces soaked through with the crimson blood that had drained away her life. She was shot through the heart!

(To be concluded next week.)

HIS TENANT'S DAUGHTER.

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CHAPTER XVII.

LADY NELCOMBE ARRIVES.

MAGGIE's swoon is a serious one, and Lord Melcombe is in despair.

With the assistance of a servant he carries her into an adjoining room and places her upon a couch. Then, at the suggestion of Lady Mildred, he leaves them, while she, with the housekeeper and a couple of maid-servants, try to restore the poor girl to consciousness.

But this is no easy matter. Maggie, who has never fainted before, now lies cold as ice, motionless as a statue, beautiful as a dream, and Lady Mildred becomes seriously alarmed, and sends off a mounted groom for a doctor, while Lord Melcombe keeps guard outside the

door like a sentinel, as though he suspected a conspiracy to spirit Maggie away from him.

As he thus keeps guard in the entrance hall, the strained expression on his pallid, handsome face testifies to the mental agony he suffers, though his eyes flash dangerously as Captain Drake approaches him, and says, in a depreciatory tone,—

"I am very sorry if anything I may have said has caused this young lady's indisposition, but I really only repeated what was told to me in good faith. Who is this Miss Earl?"

"She is the girl whom young Rivers wished to marry," replies his lordship, curtly. "and it was a cruel libel to call her a *jilt*. She had nothing to do with the young fellow's illness; it was her father who refused the connection, and brought her sway from Devonshire. Not that she cared for Rivers, but it is enough to make any girl faint to be told, in the brutal manner you told her, that she had murdered a man."

Captain Drake's face becomes very pale. He is not accustomed to be addressed in this manner by any man—be his social status what it will; and many years spent among savage tribes, where life is cheap, and death follows swiftly upon insult, has made him impatient and arrogant.

From habit he thrusts his hand inside the breast of his coat, but the absence of a weapon recalls him to the fact that he is among civilized people, where words are more cutting than knives; and he pulls himself together, and says, coldly,—

"Then Thurston Rivers is dead?"

"No more dead than you are!" retorts Lord Melcombe, curtly.

So saying he turns on his heel. Drake is no friend of his—never will be; and he is in no mood to be civil to a man who has upset all his plans, put Margaret's life in jeopardy, and possibly blighted his own happiness.

Indeed, he is in that mood in which he cares for nobody and for nothing; his one hope and only desire being that Maggie may recover and may consent to find refuge in his arms from all the troubles and vexations that beset her.

"Melcombe seems pretty far gone," remarks Captain Drake to his friend when he rejoins him. "If the girl were his *fiancée* he couldn't make more fuss about her. I suppose they are not engaged?" he asks, addressing Lady Beckford, who has overheard his remark.

"Oh, dear, no!" replies her ladyship, promptly, and in a tone which implies volumes of disdain, "nothing of the kind!"

"It won't be his fault if they are not engaged very shortly," remarks Captain Drake, with a smile. "But I am sorry I have been the innocent cause of disturbing your dinner in this manner, Lady Beckford."

He looks at his watch as he says this, as though he were thinking of going, but Lord Ronald says, promptly,—

"You are not going yet? Come into the billiard-room. Miss Earl will be better soon, and then we shall have some music. Girls think nothing of a faint, and she's awfully jolly, I can tell you."

Whereupon Lady Beckford frowns, with a sudden suspicion that her son may likewise become a victim to this girl's fatal fascinations; but just at this moment a servant approaches her ladyship, and says, in a low voice,—

"Lady Melcombe has arrived, my lady."

In the annoyance which she had felt at the scene at her dinner-table, Lady Beckford had for the moment forgotten that she was expecting the arrival of her old friend, but now she hastens into the hall to meet her.

Lord Melcombe is already talking to his mother—not too well pleased, to judge from the expression of his face, by her unexpected arrival; but as the doctor who has been sent arrives a few seconds after Lady Beckford meets her friend, he goes to speak to him, and to beg that he will let him know at once if Miss Earl's life is in danger.

A request which makes Dr. Budd regard him with surprise, though he gravely promises; and then, with a profound bow to Lady Beckford, he passes into the room where Margaret Earl is still lying, silent and motionless, as though she were in a trance.

Lady Mildred is there with the housekeeper, her maid and another servant; and all of them are looking pale and anxious, for they have tried cold water, salts, brandy, burnt feathers, everything they can think of; have rubbed the hands and feet of the unconscious girl, and still life is suspended, if it is not altogether gone.

The doctor quickly applies stronger restoratives, and then there is a gasp, a sigh, and life slowly flows back again, with all the attendant pain and sickening agony which the nearly drowned suffer in coming back to life.

Never, so long as she lives, will Maggie forget this experience. The very smell of the charnel-house seems to be in her nostrils; she seems to breathe Death—to feel the grim spectre about her—and she is so heavy and drowsy that the doctor has carried gently to a bed-room, and it is not until Maggie is in bed and has fallen into a deep slumber that he leaves the Castle.

While waiting for some of his orders to be carried out, Dr. Budd has conversed with Lord Melcombe, he being the one person, besides Lady Mildred, who takes most interest in the sick girl; and to him he says, cheerfully,—

"The young lady will be all right in a day or two. She must have had some sudden shock, for the organs are all healthy."

"She had a sudden shock," replies his lordship, gravely; "but I hope she will quite recover from it. When you see her again, will you tell her how anxious I am about her?"

Dr. Budd promises to do so, and not until he has left the Hall, and Lord Melcombe is assured that Maggie is sleeping a natural sleep, does he remember that his mother is under the same roof with himself, and is momentarily expecting him to come to her.

There are mothers who spoil their sons, and, it is to be feared, their name is legion; there are also sons who spoil their mothers, though their number is very few; but of this minority Lord Melcombe is one.

Hitherto, his mother has been the first in his heart and in his estimation. Never, until now, has he given her a rival; and, like a spoilt though faded beauty whose reign is at an end, she refuses to believe that there is a woman living who can supersede her.

Again and again, it is true, she has urged her son to marry, but she does not mean his marriage to bring any other woman to stand in her stead. While she lives she means to be first at Melcombe Towers and in all the homes belonging to her late husband, as she has been first since the day of her marriage.

What she wants is, that her son shall bring home a daughter to her, one who will expect nothing more than to be second to herself, and yet who, at the same time, is both well-born and well-dowered.

Many mothers who have an only son desire this kind of thing. Few get it, and Lady Melcombe is not likely to be more fortunate than the majority of mothers.

For the last four-and-twenty hours Lady Melcombe has been working herself up into a rage, and now the vials of her wrath are waiting to be poured upon the head of her transgressing son.

Lady Beckford's first letter, which hinted at her son's infatuation for Miss Earl, reached her only a few days ago, when she was suffering from an agonising attack of neuralgia; a second followed, confirming all that the first had implied; and then she resolved upon this journey, let the pain of it cost her what it might; and here she is, arrived just at a moment when her influence is of all times the least likely to be felt.

Under ordinary circumstances, Lord Mel-

combe might try to propitiate his mother, to treat her warnings as a jest, to meet her gloomy prognostications with a smile; now he is in no humour to bear either lectures or complaints.

During the past two hours he has endured more intense suffering than has hitherto been compassed in his whole lifetime. The dread that Maggie might die; the agony of jealousy which will not be stilled when he thinks of Thurston Rivers and of the effect which Captain Drake's words had had upon her, and the remembrance of Maggie's manner towards himself, which lacks in it something which he cannot define, but for which his heart craves.

All this, added to the consciousness that everybody is against him in this matter. That not only his mother, but all his friends would do anything possible to divide Maggie and himself, drives him into an attitude of self-defence, one almost of aggression, and at the first angry word his mother utters an expression of sternness comes over his handsome face, which positively startles her.

Such scenes as that which follow are not edifying to the spectators, and I will pass over it.

If Lord Melcombe had been treated with kindness and sympathy by his mother on the present occasion he would have been as wax in her hands. But his heart has been too much torn of late for him to be overwhelmed by her displeasure, and when she indiscreetly asserts that he was invited here to propose to Lady Mildred, and that Lord and Lady Beckford are greatly annoyed at his behaviour, he says coolly and quietly,—

"I am glad to know this, if it is so. You shall hear from me, mother!"

And, despite her commands to stay, he leaves her.

Half-an-hour afterwards he has likewise left Crane Hall. Before going, however, he has asked to see Lady Mildred.

She, he feels assured, can be no party to this despicable plot; she has sought Maggie as a friend; will sympathise with both of them; and he appeals to her now to see that Maggie suffers no harm; to send her home to her aunt on the morrow.

Then he says "good-bye," requesting her to make his adieu to her parents.

"But why go to-night? Why not stay till the morning?" Lady Mildred pleads.

He answers decisively,—

"No; my mother and I are best apart for a time; but I hope that you and I shall meet again under more pleasant circumstances."

Then he kisses the hand which she extends to him, and walks out into the dark night, refusing the offer of a carriage, while his valet follows in a light cart with a groom and his luggage.

Late as it is when he reaches the Beckford Hotel, and takes up his quarters there, he sends a note to Mrs. Wynn, telling her that her niece was suddenly taken ill while at dinner, but is better now, and Lady Mildred Greystone has promised to send her home in the morning.

This letter puzzles Mrs. Wynn considerably, for she has already received a message from Lady Mildred concerning Maggie, and she feels very sure that the matter is more serious than she had at first supposed.

Meanwhile, the cause of all this disturbance is sleeping peacefully. No thoughts of Lord Melcombe nor of Thurston Rivers disturb her repose.

The shock to which a few hours ago she succumbed has left her weak and mentally incapable of action, and she sleeps so heavily that the maid who has brought her an early cup of tea finds much difficulty in waking her.

Even after she drinks it she falls off to sleep again, and it is nearly ten o'clock before she finally opens her eyes and is induced to eat some breakfast.

Lady Mildred meanwhile is on tenter-hooks. Every moment she dreads that Lady Melcombe will insist upon seeing the girl who has

won her son's heart; and having heard much of Lady Melcombe's overbearing temper, she very naturally dreads a scene while Margaret renews her guest.

Of her own heartache she says nothing, and she tries to think as little.

There is some agony which must be borne in silence, with a smiling face and a breaking heart, and Lady Mildred Greystone is possessed of far too much pride to allow the world to perceive how keenly and how acutely she suffers.

Not for worlds would she allow Margaret Earl to suspect how her own proud heart is wrung by what she considers her rival's triumph.

She likes Maggie, as I have said. She is greatly attracted towards her, but they have not known each other long enough for there to be any real confidence between them; and though she was curious to know what Maggie was like, and though she felt sure she would not improve upon acquaintance, she feels now that she was mistaken.

In mere personal charms Maggie is infinitely her superior; in refinement and elegance she is her equal; and a feeling of humility comes over the Earl's daughter, which is as beneficial for one of her character as it is rare.

Margaret eats a light breakfast, then says she must dress at once and return to her aunt, who will be expecting her. And as soon as she is ready to go Lady Mildred comes into the room to see her.

"I am glad you are better!" she says, looking earnestly at the lovely face which still bears traces of the shock of the previous night.

"Yes, I am better, thank you," is the reply.

"Do you often faint?" asks her ladyship, with polite interest.

"No; I never did so before," is the answer; then, after a moment's hesitation, she asks,— "Is it true, can you tell me, is—Is Thurston Rivers dead?"

The pallor of her face, the eager expression in those wondrous eyes, the parted lips, the girl's whole attitude tell Lady Mildred that here is a sufferer rather than a successful rival, and she says impulsively,—

"No; Mr. Rivers is not dead. He was ill, and he has gone to Italy, I believe. Lord Melcombe could have told you this at any time if you had asked him!"

"I didn't like to ask him," says Maggie, with a deep-drawn sigh. "I did inquire after the others. But I must go now. I am sorry to have been so much trouble, Lady Mildred, but what that gentleman said at dinner was so cruel and so untrue that it crushed me, and I remember no more!"

"Was it untrue?" asks her ladyship, more kindly.

"Yes, it was untrue!" is the answer. "I had nothing to do in the matter. My father says I must never marry. But I don't want to think of it; let me go, please!"

"That is a strange thing for a father to say to his daughter!" responds Lady Mildred, curiously.

"It is all strange," is the weary response; "but my head is aching, do let me go. I shall be ill again if I stay any longer!"

"As I brought you here I will take you home again!" cries Lady Mildred, acting on a sudden impulse. "My hat and jacket, Lucy!" this to her maid, who hastens to dress her.

Just as they were about to leave the Hall a woman servant, dressed very much like a lady, comes hastily after Margaret and says, in a tone which is almost offensive,—

"My lady wants you before you go, miss!"

Margaret looks at the woman in surprise; there is something so insolent in her gaze that her own eyes flash, and turning to Lady Mildred she asks, with unconscious hauteur,—

"Who is this person?"

"She is Lady Melcombe's maid," replies Lady Mildred, nervously, dreading a scene.

"You don't know her, do you?"

"No." Then turning to the woman Margaret says, proudly: "Tell your mistress she must excuse me."

So saying, she steps into the carriage, Lady Mildred follows, and they are driven away, neither of them aware at the time that Lady Melcombe is at one of the upper windows angrily watching them.

"What can Lady Melcombe mean by sending me such a message?" Margaret asks, as they drive through the park. "The woman's manner was positively insolent. She addressed me as though I had been a servant!"

"I suspect that Lady Melcombe is in a bad temper herself this morning," replies Lady Mildred, evenly. "She arrived last evening directly after you had fainted; she quarrelled with her son, who left the house late as it was, and I suppose she has not yet recovered her good-temper. But I am glad you did not go to her, it would only have put you out!"

"I should not think of going to her!" is the reply.

And then they lapse into silence, and neither of them speak until they pull up at Mrs. Wynn's door.

Here another surprise awaits our heroine.

Her father is standing at the dining-room window, and she does not perceive him until she has invited Lady Mildred to come in.

"Yes, I will speak to Mrs. Wynn," is the reply, "and explain how it is that we kept you all night."

Then, as Maggie suddenly exclaims, "There is my father!" her ladyship mentally adds,

"Ah! Then now I shall see the man who has so foolishly forbidden his daughter to marry!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

LORD MELCOMBE DECLINES TO PROMISE.

CAPTAIN EARL's first impulse is to take his daughter in his arms and express the happiness he feels at meeting her again.

But he is naturally cold and reserved, particularly before strangers; so he kisses her formally upon the forehead, as though it were a matter of duty, and then bows gravely to Lady Mildred Graysome, to whom he is introduced.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" he asks, addressing his daughter, whose pallid cheeks make her dark eyes look larger and more pathetic than usual. "You are looking positively ill!"

"Miss Earl fainted last night while we were at dinner," Lady Mildred hastens to say; "that is why I brought her home this morning. I was afraid Mrs. Wynn would think I had not taken care of her."

"I was surprised to find Maggie gone when I returned home last night," replies Mrs. Wynn, coldly; "but I am glad she is back again, particularly as her father has come to take her away!"

"To take her away!" echoes Lady Mildred in a tone which, despite her efforts to the contrary, is palpably one of satisfaction.

"Yes, he meant to take her away this morning," is the reply, with a glance at her niece, "but she doesn't look fit to travel."

"I can't travel to-day!" says Maggie, who has overheard this, and she passes her hand wearily over her brow. "I want to go to sleep, I am tired; perhaps I shall be better to-morrow. Thank you for your kindness, Lady Mildred, and I had better say 'good-bye.' Perhaps we shall never meet again!"

"Oh, we are sure to meet again," responds Lady Mildred, cheerfully. "This is a very little world, and we have many mutual friends. But I must go; good-bye."

And, to Maggie's surprise, Lady Mildred kisses her, then shakes hands with her father and aunt, and is accompanied to her carriage by Captain Earl, who is very favourably impressed by her dignity and beauty.

While her father is thus engaged, Margaret says hurriedly to her aunt,

"I can't bear a scene with papa this morn-

ing; tell him I have gone to lie down, and don't let me be disturbed, aunt—whoever calls!"

"Lord Melcombe is sure to be here soon," objects Mrs. Wynn, significantly. "Won't you see him? It may be your only chance!"

"No, I won't see anybody to-day," is the answer. "If I am left alone I shall be able to travel to-morrow."

But Mrs. Wynn is not to be silenced in this manner, and she says hurriedly,

"Reflect; this may be your only chance of becoming Countess of Melcombe. Everybody is against you—the Earl is in love with you, it is true—but Lady Mildred is in love with him. If you have fallen into any trap it is she who has laid it for you; so don't count too much on her friendship. Shall I send for you when Lord Melcombe calls?"

"No, I must be quiet and alone!" is the positive reply.

Then Maggie hurries to her own room like some wounded animal, eager only to get into a dark, solitary corner, where she can hide her sufferings from mortal ken.

Her thoughts wander back to Boscombe Castle—to Thurston Rivers, and she understands now why he has been silent for so long.

"How he must have loved me!" is the thought that fills her heart to the exclusion of every other sentiment. "Better, ah! better than I loved him! But I will be worthy of such love; ambition shall not tempt me; my father's threats shall not frighten me, and if only I can be assured that Thurston loves me still, I will be true and steadfast to him. Yes, true even unto death!"

Yesterday she felt deserted. In her ignorance as to what had occurred at Boscombe after she came away, she had jumped at the natural conclusion that the lover, who, when forbidden her presence, had held high his hand above his head as though calling Heaven to witness to his fidelity, had speedily forgotten her; and it was only natural, therefore, that her bruised heart and lacerated pride should take refuge in the love of one whom all who come near him delight to honour.

Yes, it is true! If Lord Melcombe had spoken yesterday, Margaret might have listened to his love; but to-day, when the hope that Thurston Rivers will come to claim her is again revived, she will lend no ear to any other suit, and the young Earl's wealth and honours carry no more weight against her resolution than does his handsome face and gentle winning manners.

"I like Lord Melcombe," is her mental conclusion; "like him too well to wound him, so I will shut myself up until papa takes me away, and, perhaps, before we meet again, he will have forgotten me, or—"

She does not finish the sentence; even to herself she cannot say.

"Or Thurston may love some other girl and marry her. And then, deserted as I have already believed myself to be, I may be only too glad of Lord Melcombe's love!"

No; thoughts will come into our hearts, which we decline to put into form, or to recognise; and Margaret Earl is as yet only playing with love.

Up to this time, love has only come to her in glances, and in ordinary words uttered in tender tones.

The magic words, "I love you," have never yet been breathed in her ears. The first kiss of love has not yet been pressed upon her lips; and even her feeling towards Thurston Rivers is a sentiment rather than a passion.

Like one whose soul is only half awakened, or like a rose-bud slowly unfolding its petals under the influence of the sun's bright rays, Maggie is, as yet, only dimly conscious of the power of love; and all through this day she lies upon her bed, her face turned towards the wall, the blinds drawn, dozing, dreaming, sighing, not knowing very clearly whether she is suffering from headache or heartache, only conscious of a heavy wearying pain.

What an incalculable amount of passive

resistance a woman can practice under the guise of a headache!

You cannot prove that her head does not ache; possibly she would suffer less actual pain if it did. You only know that a sort of mental and physical collapse has set in; that she can scarcely eat, that she cannot walk or talk; that it would be brutal to carry her against her will; and that whatever plans you may have made, however eager you may be to take her with you, and put a hundred miles between yourself and your present quarters, whatever the loss may be, here you are bound to stay unless you will go without her.

Vainly does Captain Earl fret and fume the whole of this livelong day, while his daughter lies silent and only half awake in her darkened room.

So impatient is he, so sceptical of her inability to travel, that he sends for Dr. Budd, who attended her last night at Crane Hall, and before he can see his patient, explains to him that it is above all things important that he should take his daughter away from Beckford this very day.

But when the doctor has seen Maggie, Captain Earl gets no comfort. The fair girl is depressed and evidently suffering, and the physician expresses his opinion that she must not be compelled to travel until she feels well enough to do so.

"If I could only get her as far as London to-day I should not care!" exclaims the Captain, testily. "To stay here will disarrange all my plans!"

Whereupon Dr. Budd gives his head a professional shake, and says,

"You will have to wait. This prostration is consequent upon the fainting fit of last night. With perfect quiet your daughter will probably recover in a day or two; if against her inclination she is taken on a journey, I will not answer for what may follow!"

This is not the reply which Captain Earl desires, and he feels irritable in consequence.

Having to remain here will entail much mortification upon himself, which he would very gladly avoid, and in his anger, he half wishes that he had no daughter about whom he need trouble himself—a wish no sooner formed than discarded with horror, as he remembers but too vividly how, so soon after he had wished that his erring wife were dead, he was, against his will, compelled to go and view her lifeless body.

Yes; that terrible wreck of once lovely womanhood was Margaret's mother!

Oh, if women, standing on the brink of temptation, would only think of their innocent children, whose lives they are about to blight with the indelible stain of dishonour, surely they would pause; and, forgetting fancied wrongs, and trampling beneath their feet the insidious prompting of passion, would keep themselves pure and unspotted from the world for the sake of those whom Heaven hath given to them!

Captain Earl is this day like a man possessed of an unquiet spirit.

When the doctor has gone he also leaves the house and wanders about the town, not returning to the mid-day dinner—an omission which his sister resents, she having, metaphorically, killed the fatted calf in his honour.

About half-past three in the afternoon, when he does return, Maggie still keeps her room, but he finds Lord Melcombe with his sister.

Mrs. Wynn introduces the young peer, then, under some frivolous pretext of speaking to Maggie, she leaves the room, and her brother and Lord Melcombe are left together.

Did you ever see, or rather, hear, a girl talking against time? Keeping up a constant flow of conversation, scarcely conscious of what she is talking about; anxious only to prevent any awkward pause, during which a dreaded proposal shall be made, which will necessitate a decisive and straightforward answer?

If you have, you will understand how

Captain Earl talked this afternoon. If you have not, please imagine the scene, because, otherwise, your patience might be exhausted if I were only to recount half of what he said on this memorable occasion.

But to a man, given rather to silence than to speech, the effort required for this kind of thing is too great to be long sustained, and when at last he pauses for lack of breath, Lord Melcombe says quietly, but with straightforward suddenness,—

"Captain Earl, I want to marry your daughter. Have you any objection?"

"Yes; I object to my daughter marrying at all!" is the decisive reply. "My objection to you, my lord, is not a personal one," he adds, quickly; "and I suppose I ought to say I feel honoured by your proposal."

By an almost imperceptible movement of the hand, Lord Melcombe sets aside the implied compliment and says,—

"I have heard of this singular objection on your part, Captain Earl, but you must be well aware that your prejudice is one that will not long be respected. For my own part, I had meant to win your daughter's consent before I asked yours; as I hear you are going to take her away I ask yours now, but—"

He pauses, possibly thinking the words he was about to utter might be considered offensive, and Captain Earl says hotly,—

"But you do not consider my refusal an insuperable barrier?"

"Well, frankly, I do not!" is the answer, and Lord Melcombe smiles.

"Then you would marry my daughter in spite of my refusal?" asks the father, hotly, his indignation being so great that he cannot keep still, but paces the room as he speaks.

"I think it highly probable that I shall do so if I have the opportunity!" is Lord Melcombe's unflinching reply.

"If you do will bring misfortune and possible disgrace on yourself!" exclaims Captain Earl, his face working with a variety of painful emotions.

"Remember!" he continues, "I have positively refused my consent to your marriage with my daughter; if, in defiance of what I have said, you at any future time marry her, I will not be blamed for the consequences which may fall upon yourself. That my reason for saying this is a grave one you may be sure, or I should not refuse such a position as you can offer my child; and when I tell you that it is for your sake, not for my own or for hers that I do forbid such a union, you may think it worth your while to take my objection into consideration!"

Lord Melcombe does not reply for a second or two, then he asks suddenly,—

"Is there madness in your family?"

"Madness!" echoes Captain Earl, with flashing eyes. "No! What do you mean? Do you wish to imply that I am insane?"

Lord Melcombe laughs impatiently before he says,—

"No; I was thinking of Maggie. I thought you meant to warn me that there is insanity in your family."

"Oh, dear, no! It is worse than that—far worse!" is the sad reply. "But it is useless to speculate, Lord Melcombe. I am not going to lay bare the skeletons in my closet to every man who wishes to marry my daughter. If you knew the truth you would refuse to marry her. Be satisfied, therefore, and spare her and me, by accepting my refusal to allow you to do so."

"Is your objection based upon anything which your daughter has herself done?" asks Lord Melcombe, rising as if to go.

"No; she is the victim of one who is dead, as I am the victim likewise, as you also will be if you do not except my warning!" is the answer.

Then, changing his tone, he asks in one that is almost of entreaty,—

"Promise me that you will think no more about Maggie?"

"Couldn't make such a promise!" is the smiling reply. "Frankly, I think you have

become morbid over some family trouble; if you will tell me the nature of that trouble it may possibly influence me. Up to the present you have only made me more eager to succeed."

"The girl is like her mother, a veritable Circe, who steals men's senses—makes them mad!" cries Captain Earl, passionately, losing the control, which, reserved man as he is, he usually keeps over his tongue. "Look at young Rivers," he continues, with unconscionable pity; "see how she has possessed his mind to the exclusion of all other hopes and desires; and though I hid her here from him you find her and become another victim, and I don't suppose she cares the value of a straw for either of you!"

"You favour young Rivers?" asks the Earl, coldly.

"No, I don't; I told him as I tell you. With my consent my daughter shall never marry!"

"Ah! The prize will be for him, or for me!" is his lordship's mental comment.

But aloud he says,—

"I am sorry to hear you say so, Captain Earl; but here comes my mother, so I will meet her and save you further discussion on this subject at present."

"It is useless your mother coming to me!" exclaims the Captain, feeling like a man standing at bay; "my decision is irrevocable. I wish—"

Then he pulls himself up suddenly; for the second time this day he has been on the verge of uttering a wish, which, if granted, would make him childless.

"I don't think my mother will trouble you much when she knows your decision," replies Lord Melcombe, sadly. "Good-bye for the present, Captain Earl; I am glad that your objection to me is not a personal one."

Then he goes out to join his mother, who is in a carriage at the door, and who scowls at her son as he leisurely approaches her.

And Captain Earl, standing at the window, and gloomily watching them, feels that throughout the whole interview the young peer has had the best of it.

He has paid him the compliment of asking his consent, but it is only too evident that he is not disheartened by his refusal, and he feels fully assured that he has not heard the last of his lordship as a suitor.

"If I can only get Maggie away from here before young Rivers makes his appearance I will hide her away from both of them!" he mutters, as he watches the carriage, in which are Lady Melcombe and her son, drive away.

Then he seeks his sister, and bids her tell Maggie that, ill or well, she must be prepared to travel early in the morning.

(To be continued.)

THE LOST CURL.

—9—

"Well, I'll have the first peep at him, or break my neck in the attempt," said Christie Bayard. So, down upon her knees she leaned, and looked over the iron railing that ran around the top of the upper verandah.

Keith Hasler, her brother's friend and guest, and the subject of her curiosity, sat on the third of the broad stone steps below, with one elbow resting on the step above. He was quietly smoking, and gazing, half dreamily, up at the full harvest moon.

"So that is the Great Mogul, is it, whom all we girls are expected to fall down and worship?" she said, with a mock little grimace. As she spoke, she gave her head a decided toss of contempt, and tripped back through the hall to the room of her cousin, Edith Saunders.

Not waiting for a reply to her tap on the door, she entered, with her hand upon her heart, and made a profound salaam, giving her eyes a tragic roll.

"Edith ch're," she said, "I have seen him;

and yet I live! You should but gaze upon him: 'Hyperion's curls—the front of Jove himself.' Entrancing! But I'll not tell you another word. I'll punish you for not going with me to look at him. And so, Miss Saunders, I bid you good-night." And with an affectionate kiss and a gay little laugh, Christie vanished into her own apartment.

That sancy, determined toss of Christie's head, as she left the verandah, had not been without result; for it displaced a bunch of crimped, loosely pinned to the top of her head, and as she tripped off into the house they went floating down straight towards the gentleman on the doorsteps, and brushing over his eyes, lodged across his nose and moustache.

"What under heaven!" exclaimed Hasler, taking hold of the light, golden mass. "Bless my stars! if it isn't fair hair. Why, the air must be full of angels; and one of them has lost a curl. I'll put it in my pocket."

Only an hour ago Keith Hasler had arrived at Bramleigh, for a visit of a week or two, to his friend, Gerold Saunders. It was so late that the ladies had retired to their rooms, so, after a hearty supper, he had gone out on the front steps, to enjoy a cigar in the moonlight; while Gerold went to the library to write important letters for the early mail. But though the girls had disappeared, they had not yet gone to bed, as we have seen.

The sun was just an hour old, next morning, when, from out the shrubbery at the east of the house, came a clear sweet voice, merrily singing: "Carnations too, all wet with dew," and Christie Bayard appeared, rosy and fresh, from her customary morning walk.

"There's Cousin Gerold in the hammock, as usual," she cried, suddenly; "and dozing, I'll venture." Her eyes were full of mischief. "I'll just slip up and give him a swing that will forbid sleep a seat upon his eyelids. It will be such fun to see him start up."

In a moment more the hammock-rope was given a tremendous jerk; and the hammock itself went swinging so high up that it completely capsized, depositing, not Gerold, but Keith Hasler, almost at Christie's feet.

The ludicrousness of the scene, for a moment, overcame every emotion, except merriment, on the part of the young transgressor. So, when Hasler picked himself up, his wrathful countenance enhanced by a pain over one temple, where, on putting up his hand, he felt a huge lump, was met by Christie's peals of laughter. For a moment his anger got the better of his good-breeding.

"Children who do not know how to behave should be kept in the nursery," he said, scarcely deigning to give Christie a second glance. "Your brother told me you were always playing pranks at others' expense when you were not in the school-room; but he failed to warn me that you were absolutely vicious."

He clapped on his hat as he spoke, and strode out of sight, before Christie, in her surprise and amusement, could speak a single word of explanation.

"What a goose," she laughed. "He evidently thinks that I am little Daisy: he didn't look long enough at me to find out; and he supposes I upset him purposely." Her face grew sober. "But what will he think when he finds that 'I be I'! Mercy! He will tell all of them at the house; and then what a row there'll be; for they've all warned me to be on my good-behaviour. He is so dignified, they say. Poor me!"

Christine had reached the house, revolving these things, and now met Gerold at the front door. Keith Hasler was coming up the walk.

Now Keith was, usually, a man of complete self-control. He had already recovered from his anger. So the most acute observer could not have detected the intense surprise which he felt when he was presented to "Miss Bayard," and recognized in her the transgressor whom he had thought only a child.

Christie's heart beat quick enough, we may imagine, at Gerold's astonished exclamation:

"What on earth, Keith, have you been about to get that ornament over your left eye? Are you going in training for a prize-fighter?"

A quick, timid little half-appealing look, from the blue eyes, determined Hasler's answer.

"Oh," he replied, with easy indifference, "it is of no consequence. In attempting to reach my hat, while I was lying in the hammock, I leaned too far over on one side; and so came down, as you see, on my head."

Never was story invented, or told, with easier readiness, or greater semblance of truth, than the one just uttered. Christie gave the speaker one fluttering, grateful look, and then, murmuring some excuse, hurried into the house.

A number of other guests arrived at Brambleigh, that day; and during the gaiety and tumult of the next week, not a single opportunity was given Christie to speak with Hasler alone, and explain her mistake.

At length, one evening, she was sitting on the verandah, listening, with uninterested ears, to the lavish compliments of a very short, fat gentleman, with a red face, who was just declaring that her society was "so delectably charming," that he was never so happy as when at her side. Suddenly, Keith Hasler stepped out from the library window opposite, and advanced towards them.

"Excuse me," he said, "but the letters are on the library table, and among them I noticed one for you, Mr. Lantham. It was marked 'important,' so I thought I would hunt you up, and tell you. Miss Bayard, I know, will excuse you, under the circumstances."

"Ah, yes; thank you. You will excuse me, Miss Bayard, will you not? So sorry. So very sorry." And Mr. Lantham bowed himself away, never suspecting that Keith Hasler himself had marked "important" on the very unimportant epistle that he went to seek.

Now was Christie's opportunity, and she availed herself of it at once.

"Oh, please, Mr. Hasler. I have been wanting so much," she said, "to say how sorry I am that I upset you from the hammock, and to thank you, over and over again, for not telling on me."

"I am the one to apologize," interrupted Keith. "Can you ever forgive my rude speech? I— I mistook you for your little sister—that, I know, was as bad as the other—but really, at that moment, I hardly knew what I did, or said—indeed, I did not."

"Well, I think it was worse to take me for a school-girl than to berate me," said Christie, with a saucy look, but one, nevertheless, that did not wholly indicate unrelenting anger.

In the hour's talk that ensued, matters were arranged most satisfactorily, in fact; and in the days that followed, Fate seemed making atonement for her first cruelty; for it gave the pair constant opportunities of being together, and enjoying many happy hours.

It was a fortnight later, when the last rays of the setting sun fell upon a gay group, at the Brambleigh mansion, gathered upon the steps, gazing over the fair Devonshire landscape.

The girls had been chaffing each other and the gentlemen; and Christie finally told how she had lost her best crimps.

"It is absolutely marvellous," said Christie Bayard, with a gay laugh, "what became of those crimps of mine. I have not laid eyes on them since the night before you all came. I am quite sure I took them off in my room."

If Christie had looked at Keith's face, she would have seen a curious expression come over it. But she was looking at her cousin instead.

"Why don't you advertise them, and offer a rousing reward?" asks one of the girls. "A sufficient inducement, no doubt, would persuade the thief to return them."

"A capital idea," responded Christie. "I'll carry it out at once."

She ran in for a card, wrote something hastily on it, tacked it to one of the columns, and then read aloud, gaily:

"Miss Bayard will give to the finder of her crimps, that were lost two weeks ago, 'whatsoever he shall ask,' 'even to the half of her kingdom.'

"We will institute diligent search," chorussed half a dozen voices, in reply. In fact, only one voice in the group was silent. But that voice was the voice of Keith. There was a thrill in his heart, and an intelligent gleam in his expressive brown eyes, which no one, however, knew of, or saw.

Later in the evening, Christie had stolen away from the joyous throng in the drawing-room, and had seated herself in a remote bay-window. One pretty little hand was over her closed eyes; the other lay idly open in her lap. She was thinking of Keith Hasler.

Suddenly something touched her, and looking down, she finds a tiny slip of paper in her lap. But how did it come there?

No one is in sight. "What can it mean?" she says. She rises, and goes to the piano, on pretence of looking over some music. There she reads, written on the slip of paper:

"If Miss Bayard will come to the clematis summer-house at half-past eight o'clock this evening, her lost curl will be restored to her."

"How strange!" she said. "It is only a trick. No, it reads as if in earnest. Yes, I will go."

As she utters this involuntarily she looks up, and her eyes are met by those of Keith Hasler. His wear such an expression that, for an instant, she half guesses he is connected with the paper in her hand.

"No, it can't be," she reflects. "He has been talking to that same young lady, with the high white forehead and the blue-black hair, ever since I slipped behind the curtains of the bay-window. No, it is impossible!"

The moon has just hidden her light behind a passing cloud, as Christie reaches the summer house. She enters its shadowy door, half timidly, half boldly. No one is there. She is about to turn back, when a restraining hand is laid upon her arm and Keith Hasler stands by her side, the golden crimp in his hand.

"Why, Mr. Hasler, where did you come from?" she cries. "And where did you find my curl?" And Christie, who had begun bold enough, finds her eyes sinking beneath his ardent look, and half averts her blushing face.

"Never mind either of those questions now," he said, coolly. "The first thing is my reward. I am going to claim what most I desire in the whole world. It is your own sweet self, Christie. You know I am to have whatsoever I shall ask."

He slips his arm around her waist; his handsome face is bent down to hers; his earnest eyes are full of tender feeling; and he is saying: "You will not refuse me, darling?"

We can guess Christie's answer from what we know of her already. An hour later, they walk slowly back to the house; and he is laughingly saying to her:

"Christie mine, I still think I was right in supposing an angel was overhead that night. Yes, it came from an angel," he said, "that precious Lost Curl."

A. L. A.

FACETIE.

The nicest things in summer hats—Pretty girls.

A good "mount" with plenty of reserve power—Mount Vesuvius.

Why is a bullock a very obedient animal? Because he will lie down if you axe him.

Why is a weathercock like a loafer? Because it is constantly going round doing nothing.

JULIET talked of Romeo's being cut up into stars. It would be well for a good many young women if their lovers were chopped up much finer than that.

Why is a silly fellow like twenty hundred pounds weight? Because he is a *simpleton* (simpleton).

LADIES should bear in mind that of all habits that of walking is the cheapest; it is also among the best.

"Shall we stick to the farm?" asks a rural exchange. You will be likely to in wet weather, unless you pave it.

A YOUNG woman being asked by a politician which party she was in favour of, replied that she was in favour of a wedding party.

LAWYER (in court): "Little boy, do you know the nature of an oath?" Little boy: "Yes, sir; it's something my pa uses to mend things at home with."

"This reminds me of the trees in spring-time," said Fogg, as the audience began to scatter when Verisoph began to speak. "When the sap rises you soon see many leaves."

Mrs. Brown (after exceptionally fine dinner): "I tell my husband that if he will bring gentlemen home unexpectedly, he won't complain if everything isn't right." Dunley: "Pray make no excuses, I wasn't at all hungry."

"An' are ye very fond of milk, Mr. Killaney?" "Faith, an' I am that same, Miss McGegan. I could drink twenty tumblers a day, yodividin; ye put a drop of whiskey in itch so that the strong taste of the milk wudn't be perceptible."

LADY: "And why did you leave Mrs. Moffet?" Servant: "Oh, she changed her colour." Lady: "Did what?" Servant: "Changed her colour. Me and two other ladies did her work, but she sent us off and got a lot of impudent naygurs in the place av us."—*American Paper*.

CAPTAIN HIGHTONE (looking at Mr. Crossus's flowers): "Aw—what are these flowers, Miss Crossus?" Miss Crossus: "Oh, those belong to the Orchid family." Mr. Crossus: "Orchid family indeed! They ain't no flowers in this here conservatory but what belongs to our own family. All bought 'n paid for. We don't do no borzyin' from the Orchid family nor any other family."

SOCIETY DAME: "Who is that young man who is attentive to you now?" Great Belle: "He is a poet." "Meroy on us! And do you, the proud daughter of a hundred millionaires, propose to throw yourself away on a poor, miserable starveling of a poet?" "Oh, he isn't that kind of a poet. He writes soap advertisements." "My own, own daughter, after all. Ask him to dinner."

THEY were standing at the front gate: "Won't you come in the parlour and sit a little while, Georgie, dear?" "N—no, I think not," replied George, hesitatingly. "I wish you would," the girl went on. "It's awfully lonesome. Mother has gone out, and father is upstairs groaning with rheumatism in the legs." "Both legs?" asked George. "Yes, both legs." "Then I'll come in a little while."

"Howdy, Awthaw?" "Howdy, Chawly? What's wrong?" "Why, Awthaw, you know that vulgar woddy Jawnshaw?" "What, the fellow that says e-ther 'fob ither?" "The very same." "Well, what did he do?" "Why, he looked at me weal wudly this morning as I was pawing by and said, 'Deah me! What an old humbug Bawnnum is, to be suah, to advatise that his menawgaw is entiably destroyed!'"

DR. SCALEL: "I think I will have to call a consultation in your case, sir." Patient (alarmed): "And why?" Doctor (calmly): "To ascertain whether you will be worth more to me dead than alive. You see, I can easily collect my claim from the estate, but—"

Patient (who has the name of calling a strange physician every time he feels ill): "That's all right, doctor; if you'll tell me about what you think it will be, I'll pay in advance."

SOCIETY.

THE Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh and the young Princesses are, it is understood, about to leave Malta for some months. Before leaving the Duke and Duchess intend giving an amateur theatrical entertainment at San Antonio Palace, and a garden party to about six hundred of the élite of Malta. When the Duke sails with the squadron for Barcelona Her Royal and Imperial Highness the Duchess will accompany the squadron in the despatch vessel *Surprise*.

The Marquis and Marchioness of Lansdowne have met with a most enthusiastic reception at Toronto. The Governor-General proceeded to a pavilion specially erected for the occasion, where, in the presence of a large concourse of people, the Mayor and Corporation presented a farewell address, expressing regret at the loss which the colony would sustain by his appointment as Viceroy of India, eulogising his administration, and giving assurance of loyalty to the Crown. Similar addresses to the Marquis were also presented from various societies and leagues.

A SALE OF WORK, on rather a new principle, was held in the parish room of St. Agnes Church, Sefton Park, Liverpool, got up by the energy of the ladies of the congregation, and intended to be the first of a series of annual sales, to be held in May of every year, the proceeds of which are to be devoted to a Mission formed for the purpose of propagating the principles of Christianity among the high caste Hindoos. The special feature of this fancy sale consisted in the arrangement of the six stalls, each of which bore a separate and distinct class of goods, though all alike were beautiful pieces of handiwork. The first stall was laden with useful articles for ladies; the second, toilet requisites; the third, travellers' necessaries; the fourth, babies' and children's clothing; the fifth was a useful clothing stall; and the sixth, a flower stall. A brisk business was done, purchases being made with a rapidity which testified not only to the beauty of the articles for sale, but to an appreciation of the object for which the sale had been organised.

The marriage of Mr. G. M. Brown-Westhead, son of Marcus Brown Westhead, Esq., of Len Castle, Worcestershire, and Redulph Newton, Lancashire, with Miss Ada Pearson, youngest daughter of the late John Pearson, Esq., of Golborne Park, Lancashire, took place recently at St. Peter's, Newton-le-Willows.

The bride was attired in a bodice and train of ivory-white corded silk over a petticoat of the same trimmed with Brussels point-lace (her mother's gift), and sprays of orange blossom, orange blossom in her hair, and tulle veil, and her ornaments included a diamond spray, the gift of her mother; diamond bracelets, the gift of Mrs. Brown-Westhead; and diamond star, the gift of Sir Andrew Walker, Bart. Her bouquet was composed of orange blossoms, eucharis lilies, stephanotis, and myrtle. She was attended by one bridesmaid, who was dressed in ivory-white surah trimmed with silk lace, large white felt hat with feathers, and carried a bouquet of yellow roses; she also wore a diamond and sapphire fly brooch, the gift of the bridegroom.

The Royal Artillery gave a most enjoyable Ball at Woolwich recently. It was not at all overcrowded. There were more white gowns worn than any other. Mrs. Pratt had a white net skirt and white satin bodice, the front a mass of white sequins—a very hand-some dress. Miss Tupper wore white over green; and many of the young ladies had coloured sashes or trimmings with their white gowns. Mrs. Hanard wore a most effective dress of soft grey corded silk, with a long plain train, the bodice trimmed in quite a new way, one side with bead galon carried to the back of the bodice, the other side with tulle; she carried a large bouquet.

STATISTICS.

A WIRE ROPE half a mile long, six and one-fourth inches in circumference, and weighing seven and one-half tons, has been manufactured at Gateshead. There are six strands of nineteen wires each in it, the breaking strain of the whole being 175 tons, and that of each wire in the rope 120 tons, to the square inch. This immense rope is to be used in a colliery in North Wales.

BONDED GOODS.—The bonded stock of tea in the Customs and Excise warehouses of the United Kingdom on April 30 was 93,828,598 lbs., against 86,691,461 lbs. at the corresponding period of last year and 81,264,079 lbs. in 1886; the stock of coffee being 323,056 cwt., against 310,307 cwt. and 465,286 cwt.; cocoas, 18,269,835 lbs., against 9,843,834 lbs. and 6,158,097 lbs.; currants, 247,802 cwt., against 152,544 cwt. and 270,164 cwt.; and raisins, 105,813 cwt., against 65,354 cwt. and 87,780 cwt. respectively. The stock of rum in bond, on the same day was 8,036,549 proof gallons, as compared with 8,369,839 proof gallons and 9,444,398 proof gallons; brandy, 5,036,340 proof gallons, against 5,181,028 proof gallon and 4,819,271 proof gallons; wines of all kinds, 7,942,112 gallons, against 7,862,208 gallons and 7,423,255 gallons; and unmanufactured tobacco, 122,417,208 lbs., against 107,122,075 lbs. a year ago, and 88,945,518 lbs. at the end of April, 1886.

GEMS.

THE POOREST EDUCATION that teaches self-control is better than the best that neglects it.

BETTER to be despised for too anxious apprehension than ruined by too confident a security.

HONOR is like the sun, which, as we journey towards it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us.

THE MORE WEAKNESS, the more falsehood; strength goes straight. Every cannon-ball that has in it hollows or holes goes crooked.

THE NOBLEST CHARACTERS are those who have steered the life-boat through stormiest seas. A bed of down never nurtured a great soldier yet.

OUR GUIDES, we pretend, must be sinless—as if those were not often the best teachers who only yesterday got corrected for their mistakes.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BEETS AND CABBAGE.—A palatable and pretty dish is made by baking beets (they are much sweeter when boiled), and chopping them fine, and mixing with twice the amount of finely chopped cabbage; add sugar, pepper and salt, with sufficient amount of vinegar heated and thrown over the mixture. It will keep for some time if covered tightly in an earthen jar.

DEVILED SCALLOPS.—Chop fine and stew in a little of the juice three minutes; make dressing of hard-boiled egg, chopped stale bread crumbs, a little pepper, salt and mustard, wet with a little cream; mix well together; return to the half shells; sprinkle bread crumbs on the scallops; put a couple of allspice on the top of each and a small piece of butter; bake in a hot oven twenty minutes. Serve on the half shells.

BOILED BREAD PUDDING.—Grate white bread; pour boiling milk over it, and cover close. When soaked an hour or two beat it fine, and mix with it two or three eggs well beaten. Put it into a basin that will just hold it; tie a floured cloth over it, and put it into boiling water. Send it up with melted butter poured over. It may be eaten with salt or sugar. Prunes, or French plums make a fine pudding instead of raisins, either with stue or bread pudding.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE PROSPERITY of the year in China is believed to depend greatly on the direction of the wind when New Year's Day breaks. This year a lucky wind blew at the dawn of the fresh twelve month, so that the Chinese pressage a year of plenty and longevity.

MUTUAL POLITENESS.—Alfred De Musset, the French poet, cordially hated dogs. When a candidate for the Academy he called upon a prominent member, as custom required. At the gate of the château an ugly and dirty dog received him most affectionately, and insisted on preceding him into the drawing-room. The academician entered, and in due course invited M. De Musset to the dining-room, whether they went with the dog at their heels. Seizing his opportunity, the animal placed his muddy paws upon the spotless cloth, and stole a choice bit of meat. "The wretch wants shooting!" was De Musset's thought; but he politely said, "You are fond of dogs, I see." "Fond of them!" retorted the host: "I hate them." "But this animal here?" queried De Musset. "I have only tolerated it because I thought it yours." "Mine!" cried the other; "the thought that it was yours alone kept me from killing it!"

IRISH WIT.—Even in Irish bulls there is a lurking twinkle of wit, though the obtuse man often fails to grasp it when on his first visit to the distressful country, whether he may have been asked on some such good-natured invitation as that of the fine old Irish gentleman who told his English friend, "If ever ye come within a mile or two av my house, I hope to goodness ye'll stop there!" He will be amazed to find that possibly an extra douceur will be expected by the carman who is showing him Killarney or Connemara, on the ground that, "Sure, don't ye see that I druv yer honour for the last twenty miles without a lynch-pin!" He may be startled by the graphic double answer given by a Dublin "jarvey" to an inquiry as to what the three sculptured figures that surmounted the General Post-office in Sackville-street meant. "Thim three figures are stuck up to show that it's the post-office." "But why? and who are they?" Then, determined not to betray ignorance, the answer came, "Thim three's the Twelve Apostles." "Those three, the—?" "Av coarse; sure, ye wouldn't have them all out together; the rest is inside soortin' the letters." Note, too, how prettily chivalry blends with their wit. Did ever lover say sweater words than those that Myles-na-Copaleen gives just at the tag of the "Colleen Bawn": "Sure, I am a mother to her; for didn't I bring her into the world a second time? Take her, Master Hardress; and when ye die lave yer money to the poor and yer widow to me, and we'll both be satisfied!" Is there a softer or more delicate lilt in any Scotch or English song than the words of the Irish peasant watching the girl of his heart footing it in jig or planxti on the barn floor: "Dance light, for my heart it lies under your feet, love!" There is pathos, too, of a curious sort in the well-known dialogue between an English visitor and an old Irish butler who answers the door in rusty black, and with tear-dimmed eyes. "Deen the O'Regan live here?" "He does, sir; but he's dead, rest his soul!" "Dear me! how long is he dead?" "Faith, if the poor man had lived to Wednesday next he'd just be dead a fortnight." Then what historic good things are recorded of the famous divines and legal lights of Ireland of the real order of rapid wit, as distinguished from the sayings of Sir Boyle Roche, of "bird" fame, who asked the House of Commons why they should do anything for posterity: "What has posterity done for us?" and in response to the burst of laughter explained, with profound gravity, "that by posterity he did not at all mean our ancestors, but those who immediately come after us."

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

M. B.—Fair, but irregular.

GRACE.—No remedy can be suggested for the removal of wrinkles.

LILLIE.—We do not know the work, so are unfortunately not able to help you.

W. G.—Brown eyes indicate a warm, lovable temperament, and always enhance the beauty of the face of one possessing them.

C. S.—Tepid baths, abstention from eating fatty or unwholesome foods, early hours, and a regular life all serve to render the skin pure.

AGGIE S.—You must wait till he addresses you. He will get over his bashfulness in time. Haven't you a friend who knows him who could introduce you?

LENORA.—1. There is nothing but what would be injurious. 2. If you are suffering from indigestion consult a medical man. 3. Neatness and sensitiveness to other people's opinions.

V. N.—Washing the face and hands with oatmeal, or the addition of a small amount of ammonia to the water used for that purpose will do much to free the skin of surface impurities.

PUPIL.—1. He should take a tonic and resolve determinedly to conquer the feeling. Let him mix also with older people. 2. Ordinary olive oil. 3. It should be "and Monday previous." 4. Good.

C. R. E.—The President of the United States is elected by presidential electors chosen by the States. The inhabitants of the territories and the District of Columbia do not vote for the President.

LOTTIE.—Dimples are esteemed a mark of beauty. They add to a pretty face the charm of innocence. It is not usual for a young lady to initiate a correspondence with a gentleman. You write very nicely.

C. F. W.—Christmas, New Year's, or Easter cards are never formally acknowledged by the persons to whom they are sent; but very often, when the sender is an intimate friend, he or she is verbally thanked for the compliment.

G. G.—We do not think that it was necessary for the husband to compel his wife to take his meals to him in the rain and storms of winter. He should have carried a lunch-basket, as other men do who are unable to return home to meals.

S. T.—The statement that one individual owns all the land upon which the city of London is built is incorrect. It is owned by hundreds of different persons. The Duke of Westminster is the largest London landholder according to our information.

AGGIE AND NELLIE.—1. Agnes means a "lamb," Ellen "fruitful." 2. Nellie's hair is a beautiful golden brown, Agnes's seal brown. They would both be called between colours. 3. Too unformed to judge. 4. Much too young. 5. Both pretty colours.

GEORGE.—The causes of a red nose are numerous, such as cold, a too free indulgence in ardent spirits, erysipelas, or any other eruptive skin disease. Of course the treatment calculated to remove such abnormal colour must be accordance with the diagnosis of the case.

J. E.—The marriage is perfectly legal; but if it was performed by licence, and a declaration was made that both parties were over age, or that the consent of parents or guardians had been obtained, the party making such declaration is liable to two years' imprisonment.

KITTY.—When a woman bestows with lavish hand her love upon three of the opposite sex, we are powerless to aid in an endeavour to extricate herself from such a dilemma. She is, indeed, beyond human help, and must take the consequences of such a rash action. No. 1, to whom you claim to be engaged, should, however, be informed of the elastic quality of that love before committing himself for life into your keeping.

E. A.—Cape Ducato, the southern extremity of Santa Maura, one of the Ionian Islands, called in ancient times the promontory of Lencadia, has been given the romantic title of Lover's Leap, from a legend to the effect that from that point the poetess Sapho cast herself into the sea. In nearly every one of the United States there are localities pointed out bearing this name which have been so designated from legendary tales concerning lovers who have selected Sapho's method of shuffling off the mortal coil.

E. G. W.—Auctioneering is best learned by actual practice, and not by any set rules. The learner must have a good presence, a glib tongue, and a goodly amount of persuasive eloquence. Equipped with these, he can very quickly and easily coax the money from the pockets of would-be purchasers. He should make himself familiar with the wares offered, in order that he can dilate on their quality, and never be at a loss for words to express in highest terms the grand opportunities offered.

D. S.—Volapuk (pronounced vo-la-peuk) is a new language invented by Johan Martin Schleyer, an accomplished German linguist. It is designed as a means of communication between men of different nations, more especially for the purposes of trade and travel. The need of a universal language has long been recognized, and present indications seem to point to the fact that Volapuk fills the void. It was first published to the world in 1879, and though at that time ignored by scholars, spread rapidly, until at present it is estimated that 300,000 have studied it.

M. A.—July 28th, 1869, fell on Wednesday.

TINY.—You should consult a physician. These blotches and pimples arise from so many causes that we cannot prescribe for them.

D. W.—Money in Chancery is not to be got except through the instrumentality of legal forms and the establishment of a proper legal right to it.

M. N.—Plato, the Greek philosopher, said: "Happiness consists in perfect health, moderate fortune, and a life free from excesses, effeminacy, and ignorance."

S. W.—You only give a part of the epigram. It is "Reading makes a full man, writing an exact man, talking a ready man." Bacon is the author of the sentence. It occurs in his "Essays."

E. G.—There are shops where old prints are kept in nearly all large cities. Portraits are collected by many amateurs and are valuable, like coins, for their rarity. We do not think that you will find any difficulty in getting the portraits that you want.

B. F.—There are books on the art of elocution which you can obtain of any bookseller. You can get instruction in elocution in nearly every city. Teachers advertise in the daily papers. The ordinary school text-books for young people are the best ones to study in every branch of learning.

L. S. says: "I received a letter the other day from a friend whom I had asked to look after some matters for me. He said, 'If I can do anything for you, call upon me Q. V.' Now I would like to know the meaning of those capital letters. They are cabalistic to me." They refer to the Latin words, *quantum vis*, which mean, "as much as you like."

A LOVE-SONG.

I HEARD her singing at her work,
As I passed by one day,
And paused to see the maid who sang
That ballad quaint and gay:
About a brave and handsome knight
Who loved and rode away.

II.

I saw her flitting here and there,
On household-tasks intent,
The while she sang in tender strain
Of how he did relent,
And rode full many a weary mile
To gain his love's consent.

III.

But ah! although she sang of love,
Her voice was light and gay,
And well I knew her maiden heart
Had never felt love's sway;
And yet, I explain it as you will,
I lost my heart that day.

IV.

But now I never stop to hear,
As I pass by that way,
The girl who sang, while at her work,
That ballad quaint and gay,
Because—she sings a sweeter song
In my own home, to-day.

A. D.

D. S. S.—It is hard to tell how to cure your sweet heart of flirting. Different lovers have different natures. The tit-for-tat method would work with some; others it would send entirely off. Be as attractive as you can, and some time, when you have been particularly charming, remonstrate with him sweetly, but earnestly, about his want of loyalty, and tell him how much pain it gives you, and that you fear it will make you lose your high respect for him.

A. R.—If you live in a city or town, can you not do fancy work, such as piece-embroidery, or braiding, or bead passementerie, or crocheting black silk lace or net with beads? All these are in great demand. You might learn to paint well enough to decorate fancy articles, such as fans, cards, handkerchief cases, &c. Meantime try also to improve yourself by reading and practising with the pen. As you have had no advantages of education (only two months at school), you cannot hope to write anything worthy of publication without a great deal more study and practice. The verses you send are very fair, circumstances considered. They show poetic feeling, but not sufficient art in construction to bear being published.

T. S.—Eugene Aram was an Englishman, born at Ramskill, Yorkshire, in 1704. He was of low birth, but acquired a wonderful amount of knowledge of mathematics, Latin, Greek and Celtic, and many others parts of polite literature, entirely by his own industry. In 1744 he murdered a shoemaker named Daniel Clarke, some say for the gold he possessed, but according to Aram's testimony, through jealousy of the latter's wife. The crime was concealed for fourteen years, and by accident discovered. He was arrested and tried at York, the most remarkable part of the trial being Aram's defence, conducted by himself—one of the most able and erudite attempts ever recorded in criminal annals. It availed him nothing, as he was found guilty and executed, his body being hung in chains in Knaresborough forest, in the neighbourhood of the scene of the tragedy. Bulwer wrote a very powerful novel based on this man's life and crime, and Hood's "Dream of Eugene Aram" is a poem with which every school boy is familiar.

RHODA.—Jean Pierre Boyer became President of Hayti in 1818, and administered the office with marked ability until deposed by an insurrection in 1843.

JOHN M.—The sixth and seventh verses of the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew contain a prediction of wars that will occur before the end of the world.

STUDENT.—Marcus Tullius Cicero, the greatest orator of Rome, was killed by Mark Anthony's soldiers on December 7, 43 B.C. At the time of his death he was 63 years of age.

C. S.—There are numerous digests and concordances of Shakespeare to be found in libraries. In your case the best place to consult such works is the library of the British Museum.

J. M. S.—Fluck up heart and show her you are not to be scared by a pretty girl. Call upon her and invite her to go to some nice place of amusement. Send her a copy of a new magazine, or a pretty bunch of long-stemmed roses, or a nice box of sweets. You write fairly, but use too many flourishes for a business hand.

R. T.—If you wish to have a social position, bring a few letters of introduction to some ladies of good standing. Be at some pains to get these. They will lead to your being introduced to ladies whose society will benefit as well as entertain you. Then be careful to make yourself agreeable without being intrusive or pushing.

W. M.—Salaries depend on many circumstances. The condition and kind of business, the usefulness of the clerk, the favour of the employer, and the length of service. It is impossible for us to give you any definite idea of the salary you should receive without knowing something of the average salaries paid in the place where you reside.

W. D.—You have done very wrong to "flirt" with the young girl and lead her to believe you were not married. Her innocence and impulsive trust in you makes your fault all the worse. Let her know the truth at once, express your deep regret, and ask her forgiveness, and that of the too confiding parents who permitted her to go with you on the little excursion.

E. A.—The proportions you give constitute a very fair stature for a young man. Warm-bathing, the use of the flesh-brush and nutritious food—grains, potatoes and milk—will make you flesher. Perhaps you smoke cigars and cigarettes. This practice makes many young men lean and sallow. An iron tonic taken internally and bathing the head in red oak bark tea will darken the hair.

M. L. G.—We have said before that henna was a plant—a native of Persia and Turkey—that it stained the hair and finger-nails a yellow tint. The Turkish ladies of the harem have a preparation of it that stains the finger tips a salmon-pink. Another preparation dyes the hair a permanent golden. It is sold by some chemists. It is probable that the best golden dyes for the hair sold in hair-dressing emporiums are made of henna.

A. C.—As you are fair and have nut-brown hair, wear a novice's costume of white muslin's veiling, with the veil flowing behind—or wear the lovely early English dress, made like a Mother Hubbard, only cut low in the neck or a band of black velvet around the wrists with lace falling over the hand. Never pinch your foot, it makes it look all the larger. Wear a well made, well fitting, shoe. See what we have told "E. A. A." about gaining flesh. Put a little salt in the warm bath and rub briskly. To keep off fleas, worms, eat no greasy food, and bathe your face in cold, pure water with a few drops of ammonia in it. Rub the face well after each bath.

M. B.—There is no way to remedy your big hands and feet except to keep the hands white and well attended to, and to wear little ruffles at the bottom of your sleeves, or a band of black velvet around the wrists with lace falling over the hand. Never pinch your foot, it makes it look all the larger. Wear a well made, well fitting, shoe. See what we have told "E. A. A." about gaining flesh. Put a little salt in the warm bath and rub briskly. To keep off fleas, worms, eat no greasy food, and bathe your face in cold, pure water with a few drops of ammonia in it. Rub the face well after each bath.

D. C. W.—Generally speaking, when there is a marked disparity in the ages of a married couple, the man being considerably older than his partner, the union does not prove as happy as when they are nearer one age. This is because of the fact that when the man grows old his wife attains but middle age, and finds that they have very few sentiments in common, and gradually he imagines that he is neglected, becomes peevish and sulky, and then the trouble begins. The same holds true if the woman is the senior partner. As a matter of course, there are many instances where such a disagreement never arises.

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